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AUTHENTIC SCIENCE FICTION



AUTHENTIC SCIENCE FICTION MONTHLY

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Editorial

ONE OF THE MOST OFTEN USED gimmicks in science fiction is telepathy in one or more forms. It is, or was, a convenient method of overcoming the language difficulty and getting on with the story. Action tends to be slowed if half the book is devoted to describing how the intrepid Earthmen painfully learned Martian, or Cappellan, or some other tongue hissed, croaked, whistled or barked by the members of an alien race.

I say it was because we no longer have the telepathic device with us. You remember it, a machine, headset, or plaque which, when worn by members of opposite races, bridged the gap by direct communication. The result always seemed to be a "voice inside the mind" speaking perfect, if archaic English and with an incredible depth of understanding.

It was, to put it crudely, sheer bunkum.

Because no such machine



would, or could, work in the fashion described. Even the authors finally recognised that and so we had a spate of "picture images" until, at last, these, too, faded away.

Because they wouldn't work either.

And the reason is all too painfully obvious. No two men, let alone one man and one alien, put the same importance and meaning on the same words. Even members of the same nationality, speaking the same mother tongue, do not mean exactly the same as each other when they use certain phrases. They understand each other, mostly, but only by a continuous system of filtering, guessing, and filling in. How do you know that my "red" is exactly the

same shade as your concept of "red"? How can you tell if your exact meaning has registered in a discussion? Or haven't you ever been misunderstood?

With other nationalities it is worse. Misunderstandings are notorious when trying to speak a new language. Ask any tourist. And tourists are dealing with human creatures, not extra-terrestrial aliens.

Mental telepathy, mental communication by means of words, can only work with members of the same race, or with those able to speak the same language as the sender. Otherwise, it will be the same as a German trying to communicate with an Englishman when neither knows a word of the other's language. Trying to speak to an alien who cannot even form the same sounds as we do, who has no conception of the meanings behind the words, the actions they represent, or the articles they label, will be sheer waste of time.

And picture images aren't much better. Remember, we are dealing with aliens, creatures utterly different from ourselves in more ways than one. Their visual range could be quite different from ours, they could "see" infra red or

ultra violet. Their audible range could be different, too. And they might not see the same things as we do when looking at an identical picture. Straight lines to us might, to them, be curved; plane surfaces, concave; the texture and colour of materials quite different. And they could even have a totally different system of mathematics.

So our hero, frantically broadcasting pictures of iron and copper and magnesium, all of which he needs to repair his ship, shouldn't be surprised if the helpful aliens deliver quantities of soap and wood and sealing wax things, which, to them, appear just like the images telepathed.

So now authors blandly ignore the language barrier or use convenient devices, like "hypno-tutors" or "menta-tapes," to give their characters a grasp of the alien's language.

And who can blame them?

For, until we can converse intelligently with a dog, an animal which has had a long association with mankind, or an ape, which is supposed to resemble man in many ways, how can we hope to converse with aliens?

A problem which, one day, may have to be solved.

E.C.T.



JOHN MORTON 1952

There are times when a thing has to be kept secret—even though keeping the secret endangers the thing itself.

THE BIG SECRET

by Ken Wainwright

THE EXPLOSION HAP-
pened in the dead hour
just before true dawn, at
a time when the desert was
turning from midnight black
to oyster grey and the last
stars were fading in the
brightening sky. The glare lit
the desert for miles, throwing
into sharp relief the sheds and
workshops, the spindle-towers
and the long, low barracks.
The sound was a hammer-
blow, sharp, final, splitting
the air as far as Las Palmas,
and the rising column of
smoke provided a signpost
for the reporter-loaded cars
streaming from the town to-
wards the testing fields.

They arrived to witness a

scene of orderly confusion.
Trucks wailed across the
dragging sands and men,
grotesque in asbestos armour,
played streams of foam on
smouldering wreckage. Other
men, uniformed and glittering
with insignia, shouted orders,
took reports, assessed the
total damage. Later, in the
small office devoted to Public
Relations, Major John
Laurance entertained the re-
presentatives of the Press
with plenty of hot coffee,
unlimited cigarettes and very
little information.

"The explosion occurred
just before dawn," he said.
"A full inquiry will have to
be made, but as far as we

can gather it was due to an unfortunate accident."

"Unfortunate is the word." Blake, thin, stooped, a human bloodhound with a nose for news, dragged at his cigarette. "Sabotage?"

"No."

"Can you be sure of that?"

"Quite sure." John relaxed in his chair and remembered not to smile. It was no time for smiling. "Our security precautions are absolute, and sabotage is out of the question."

"I see." One of the other reporters gulped at his coffee with a peculiarly revolting sound. "So it was just one of those things. Can you say more?"

"There is little more to say." John paused while he lit a cigarette and added to the smoke in the atmosphere. He was a medium-sized man, no longer young and yet not too old. His uniform was rumpled and his thinning hair betrayed the repeated passage of his fingers. He needed a shave. "As you know, we are running

a series of tests here to determine a better fuel for high-altitude rockets. Shed eighteen, the one destroyed in the explosion, contained a batch of the new fuel. We can only assume that one of the containers sprang a leak, the fuel escaped, a spark set it off." He inhaled, held the smoke, blew it through his nostrils. "As I said, an unfortunate accident."

"Especially for those who were mixed up in it," said Blake. "Can you give us their names?"

"Certainly." John reached into a wire basket on his desk and produced a sheaf of duplicated forms. "We have a very good check system here and so knew just who would be affected by the explosion. Fifteen men died in the blast. I have a copy of their names here for you." He handed out the duplicated sheets.

Blake took one, stared at it, rubbed it with his fingers. The ink was still wet and left black streaks on his hands.

He swore and reached for a handkerchief.

"They have only just been duplicated," said John mildly. "Did you expect anything else?"

"How could I?" Blake stared at the major. "How could you have duplicated these lists before you knew who had died?"

"Exactly," said John. He finished passing out the sheets. "These men died for their country," he said sincerely. "They accepted an arduous and dangerous assignment, and did their duty. They are, in a way, the martyrs of a new age. They are worthy of respect."

"Sure," said Blake. "We know what to do. Victims of the new era; men who laid down their lives so that others might reach towards the stars. You don't have to tell us." He glanced at the sheet in his hand, folded it, stuffed it in his pocket. "So that's all you can tell us, major? An accidental explosion, fifteen men dead, and that's all. Right?"

"Yes."

"I thought so," said Blake. "I seem to have been through all this before." He rose to his feet. "No use asking the extent of damage to the installations, I suppose?"

"No."

"Or just what the fuel was you were working on?"

"Certainly not."

"No." Blake frowned as if in deep thought. "So it's just another big bang and a litter of dead." He looked at the others. "All right, you guys, let's get out of here. You heard what the man said. Two inches would cover it, and probably will." He stalked towards the door.

John watched the reporters file out of the small office into the brightness of the early morning outside. Guards watched as they climbed into their cars and went driving off in a cloud of dust. They vanished, the guards resumed their patrolling of the perimeter fence and John closed the door.

He felt tired, irritable and

dirty. He felt tired because he had been up all night, irritable because he was tired, dirty because he didn't like what he was doing.

But it was something which had to be done.

The coffee was still hot, and he poured a cup, added sugar, tasted it, then sweetened it still more. The sugar he knew would give him energy, but only sleep would take the dry harshness from his mouth, soothe his nerves and clear his eyes. Sleep and a hot shower was all he really needed. But even as he lied to himself he recognised the lies for what they were. Sleep and a hot shower would help him physically, but it would take more than that to ease his mind.

He sat down, lit a fresh cigarette and looked at a copy of the duplicated lists he had handed out. The list was long, too long, and John sighed as he looked at it. Each item represented a man; each man represented a family,

and each family meant that brothers and sisters, fathers and mothers, nephews and cousins, girl friends and neighbours would all have an acute interest in each man. They would want to know what had happened to him, how he had died, when, and where. Questions which simply could not be truthfully answered any more than that the bodies could be handed over for burial.

But the explosion had taken care of all that.

It had taken care of the fact that the men had not died all at the same time, that ten of the fifteen had committed suicide, and that their bodies were literally out of this world. But the explosion had only taken care of half the problem; the other half, the more important half, still remained.

John was brooding over it when Latimer walked into the office.

Major Sam Latimer was an officer who had devoted his life to the pursuit of an ideal

and then, just as it was about to ruin him, had suddenly grown partly sane. Only partly. A complete cure would have earned him nothing but a court martial, disgrace, and financial ruin. The ideal was the pursuit of total Security; the partial sanity had come when John had shown him that he was riding on a diminishing spiral and that, when he began to keep secrets from himself, he would be fit for nothing but a padded cell.

He stepped forward, lifted the coffee pot, shook it, reached for a cup.

"How did it go?"

"Smooth." John relaxed and watched Sam drink coffee. He anticipated the next move by offering cigarettes. "Blake was a little suspicious. He felt the duplicated lists to see if they were old or new."

"He won't catch us like that," said Sam.

"No, but the thought was in his mind." John stared at the spiral of smoke rising from between his fingers. "Blake is

no fool. He's been a reporter too long not to be able to add two and two together. He even mentioned that the explosions were becoming monotonous. That, and his deliberate testing to see whether the lists were made out before or after the explosion, shows that he senses something to be wrong."

"This one of the lists?" Sam reached forward and picked up a copy. He rubbed it, stared at his fingers, then wiped off the black stain. "Nothing wrong with these."

"Maybe not, but he's a reporter. They managed to get out here pretty fast and the fire took a while to die down. He could start wondering how it was that we managed to cut stencils and get them run off so promptly."

"I'll see to Blake," said Sam. "I'll get him transferred or something. Anything else?"

"I don't think so. You've seen to the notification of next-of-kin and all that?"

"Sure." Sam leaned back. "The only thing which grieves

me is that we'll have to pay out pensions for those guys who did the dutch. Seems all wrong."

"Maybe." John didn't want to argue. Sam believed in keeping a secret only in one way, by denying its existence. John, as a psychologist, knew that the best way to keep a thing secret was to bring it right out into the open, but make it so obviously untrue that no one would believe it. It was a point on which they would never agree. He looked curiously at Sam.

"Do you ever get sick of what we're doing?"

"Sick?" Latimer was surprised. "No. Should I be?"

"I'm thinking of the men who 'died' out there in that explosion. They deserved better than that."

"For killing themselves?"

"Not all of them did that." John fought down his instinctive anger at the generally accepted contempt for a man who solved his personal problems in the most effective way ever devised. "But even that

is our fault. Until we solve whatever it is which makes men want to kill themselves, then we are to blame."

"I don't see it," said Sam. "Those men were in the army, soldiers, no matter what fancy names you give them. They were doing a job. It may not be a very pleasant job, but it has to be done. They are there to do it. Killing themselves is a form of desertion."

"The only form of desertion they have," reminded John. He grew thoughtful, his cigarette burning unnoticed between his fingers. "Suppose you were up there, Sam. Up on the Moon with the others. You could see the Earth sometimes but not often, only when you sneaked a look from the edge. You'd have no letters, no radio, no comfort. You'd live like an animal and work like a dog. You'd be cramped all together and death would tread on your heels every moment of every day. And there would be no leave, not, as far as you knew, for ever. You'd be up there to

stay. And you wouldn't even have the comfort of knowing that you were a hero. How would you feel?"

"Bad," admitted Sam. "But I wouldn't kill myself."

"No?" John jerked his hand as the cigarette burned his fingers. "How can you be so sure?"

"I can't be sure," said Sam. "But you're wrong on one point. There is Earth leave from the Moon. You should know that better than anyone; you're the one who talked us into giving you a guinea pig."

"Yes," said John. "I remember. A poor devil who lost his mind when he fell into the dust. They dragged him out and then didn't know what to do with him. So you gave him to me to experiment with." John sucked in his breath. "I only hope that the conditioning I gave him will work. If it does, it may provide the answer to our problem. Not a satisfactory answer, but an answer which will be better than none."

"Maybe," said Sam. "But we've got to be sure. We're keeping watch on him. Brother, how we're keeping watch! One slip and we drag him in."

He seemed to relish the prospect.

The guinea pig was a thin, slight-bodied young man of the name of Peter Weston. He was twenty-three years old, single, an orphan and lived by himself in a small, cheap apartment. He had served three years with the military forces, was a fully-trained electronic engineer and had spent four months on the Moon.

He remembered his name, age, marital status and the fact that he knew a trade. He also knew that he had done his military time in an infantry battalion and was on leave pending ultimate discharge. He knew that quite clearly because he had papers to prove it, and he also had to report to a military centre every other day. He did not

remember his true military service nor the fact that he had ever been on the Moon. Especially he did not remember the Moon.

The reason for that was obvious. No one had ever reached the Moon. They were trying—everybody knew that, and one day they might even make it. But not yet. Not for a long time yet. In the meantime they were playing with high altitude rockets for the sole purpose of gathering data as to cosmic rays and electron streams which could influence the weather. There was a lot of talk about an artificial satellite which could relay television programmes and provide a base for an observatory. But even these things were in the future. And, according to the trouble the fly-boys were having, what with explosions and crashes and failures of equipment, they were still a long way away. Especially when each explosion seemed to kill so many valuable technicians, the death of whom slowed the

ultimate conquest of the Moon still more.

So Peter Weston didn't believe that he had ever been on the Moon because it was obviously impossible. But he had even a better reason for wanting to forget. He had almost died there.

He didn't think of that now as he sat, glass in hand, listening to the pulsing music from the big, consol-type record player. Not that he could have thought of it if he wanted to. You can't think of things you don't remember, and you can't remember what you never knew. Instead, he swayed to the calculated discordancies of the improvisations, felt his nerves tighten to the scream of the trumpet and his heart pound to the throb of the drum. The music ended just in time. A few minutes longer and strained nerves would have broken, and civilised people reverted back to the primitive. As it was the small, stuffy, overcrowded room was filled with prancing feet and

snapping fingers as white men and women, proud of the colour of their skins, tried to emulate the black savages they professed to despise.

"Man! Oh, man!" Larry, his too-white face betraying his emotion, wriggled his fingers as if they were a nest of snakes. "Dig that jazz!"

"You like it?" Mary, the hostess, smiled and offered drinks. Mike, the host, dug into the records and loaded the turntable. He adjusted controls and again music ripped the air with electronic mimicry of wood and wind and pounded skin.

"Like it?" Grace, dark-haired, smooth-skinned, sloe-eyed, leaned forward and smiled at Peter. She was older than he was—how much older only she and a very few others knew—but she had the charm of youth and the vivacity of youth, and if her eyes were old and her manner too-skilful for one so apparently young, who bothered? Not Peter, certainly not Peter.

He warmed to her nearness and felt the comfort of her presence. She was his friend, his true friend, and he was more than a little in love with her.

And because of that he could talk to her, talk and talk of all the things which came into his mind, and of his hopes and dreams and ambitions. He would talk to her as they walked together, ate together, sat watching the flickering portrayals of fiction on the wide screens. He could talk to her while sober, while tired, while, as now, a little drunk. He could talk sense or nonsense, it didn't matter. He could talk of the present and of the future and, because she wanted him to, of the years that had gone. He talked often of the past. Grace was very interested in his past, and she would ask questions and tease him. Not that it mattered. She was warm and young and lovely, and he loved talking to her.

Which was exactly why she was with him.

The music died, the conversation lagged and gaiety, hard and bright and artificial, lifted its drooping head for one last attempt to blow life into the sagging, weary, suddenly old bodies sprawled on the overstuffed chairs, the settees, the carpeted floor.

"Cards," said Jim. "I feel like cards." He stared at the host. "Mike, break out a deck and let's have some poker."

"No." Mike tilted the last bottle and drank the last of the brandy. "We start that and you clean up."

"So I clean up, so what?" Jim smirked. "I could lose, couldn't I?"

"You don't," said Mary pointedly. "You never do." She rose. "Who wants coffee?"

They all wanted coffee, and sat, acutely uncomfortable, sipping the black, bitter brew from ridiculous cups. Peter turned to say something to Grace. The cup in his hand met the cup in hers, there was a tinkle of china, and a black

stain spread over the front of her gown. Her anger betrayed her maturity.

It was not hot. Hot anger is quickly cooled. It was cold, the contemptuous anger of an adult for a dirty, idiot child. And as soon as it had come it was gone, for no adult can really hold anger against an idiot child. The anger was gone, but the stain remained.

"I'm sorry," said Peter. He dabbed at the gown. "I'm so sorry."

"It's nothing." She rose and droplets of coffee flew from the marked fabric. "If I can just sponge it with water?"

"Of course." Mary, the observant hostess, came towards them. "You'd best take it right off," she said. "You can wear my robe. I'll sponge your gown and we can let it dry." She smiled. "I don't think that it is permanently damaged. Nylon, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"There you are then; some warm water, a sponge, and

it will be as good as new." She laughed at Peter's expression. "Look at the poor boy. He couldn't look more sorry for himself than if he had stolen the Moon."

"Who wants the Moon?" said Peter lightly. He was grateful to Mary for saving his embarrassment. "Need any help?"

"Certainly not. You stay here and behave yourself." The two women left the room and Peter, already feeling acutely alone without Grace, stared towards the others.

Larry was sitting cross-legged on the carpet beating imaginary drums. He was really beating them, too, slapping his hands down on invisible skin, letting his body catch his secret rhythm, gaping at the air like a fish in the pattern set by those he envied. He was comic but, just as equally, he was pathetic.

Jim was leaning back against the settee, sullen and a little sulky because he could not have his own way and get the

others to play cards. He didn't think of those who couldn't, didn't, or weren't going to be able to play. Jim was selfish. He was typically human.

Mike was playing at hypnotism.

He'd read a book and seen a film and knew just how it was done. He knew the theory and had heard men talk of what could be done, and wanted the same power for himself. Power, that was the prime motivation which drove him, power to make others do as he wished. He disguised the power, hid it, covered it with banality and smiling good humour, but deep down, under the facade, the man with the whip and gun loomed ready to spring.

So he smiled with his mouth and his words carried the ring of sincerity, but his eyes did not smile and his words could be taken two ways. He stood with his back to one wall, the light shining on his face and reflecting from his eyes, and he stared at them and they stared back

at him, because it is impolite not to look at someone when he is speaking. And it is more than impolite not to pay token attention to the man who is your host, and to whose house you hope to be invited again.

Mike knew that; knew, too, that he paid dearly for his circle of so-called friends, but he didn't care. He paid and they danced to the tune he set. That was power, small, pitiful, but power just the same.

So he tried to hypnotise them. Tried with the laughing assurance that it was just a game, something to brighten up the party, something which could do incredible good and provide endless fun. He tried and, at the same time, insured himself against the possibility of failure by a smiling denial of his own seriousness. But he did not smile at Larry's jokes, and his teeth gleamed white between his lips at Jim's inattention.

Jim saw it, recognised his mistake, offered himself as a

subject, a token sacrifice for his bad manners.

"All right, Jim," said Mike softly. "If you insist. Are you sure you really want to be hypnotized? You can't be put under unless you really want to, you know."

"I know," said Jim. He forced himself to smile. He was an author, a bad one, and played poker for money, not for fun. Mike's friendship meant two good meals a week and somewhere to go. "Go ahead, Mike. I'm concentrating."

Mike went ahead. He had a smooth voice, persuasive, and he knew what he was doing. His instructions were clear, his suggestions subtle, but he needed more practice. He went a little too fast. He commanded sleep and ordered Jim to go back.

Jim did neither. As a subject he had failed.

But Mike had not failed.

Grace sat in the outer office and twisted her fingers together until they hurt. Not

that the physical pain did any good, she knew that, but she had failed and wanted to punish herself for failing.

A man entered the office, looked at her, spoke to the receptionist and walked out again. His eyes, as he passed, were coldly appraising, the expression of a mature man who has been attracted by a woman. Grace hardly noticed him, such expressions were common to most men with whom she came in contact. She looked up as the man returned and stood over her.

"Miss Roberts?"

"Yes."

"Major Latimer, Security Corps. Will you come with me, please. Major Laurance will see you now." The words were polite, the command unmistakable. Grace clutched her purse, rose, followed the man into the corridor. The walk was short, but long enough for her to notice details. Little things like the way his civilian clothing rested on his sparse body. The unconscious movements which

betrayed the fact that he was more used to uniform than the clothes he wore.

A nurse passed them, cleanly white and smelling of antiseptics, the lieutenant's insignia on her starched front a golden patch of colour. She vanished on soft shoes down the polished corridor. An orderly, his olive shirt neatly pressed, rustled past with papers in his hand. From a long way away, seeming to be muffled by endless walls, came the rumble of a rubber-tired trolley and a stretcher came in sight, seeming to appear from the wall as the orderlies pushed it down a traverse corridor.

"Here we are." Sam paused before a door, knocked, entered. John looked up from where he sat behind his desk and rubbed tired eyes. He was wearing whites, his professional uniform, and had a beaten, dispirited look about him. He rose when he saw Grace, offered her a chair, extended cigarettes. She shook her head.

"No?" John hesitated. "Do you mind if I indulge?"

"Of course not." The old-world courtesy gave her a strange feeling of security. She sat down and waited as Sam and John lit their cigarettes, settled themselves and finally got down to business.

"I understand from Major Latimer," John nodded towards Sam, "that you were the operative assigned to Peter Weston. Is that correct?"

"It is."

"I see." John smiled, the expression giving him a brief warmth. "Please don't be afraid. Nothing is going to happen to you."

"I know that."

"Then why not relax?" John offered cigarettes again. "Come, Miss Roberts, Grace, this isn't a court martial, and it certainly isn't an inquisition. I merely hope to gain the answer to certain questions."

"Thank you." Grace took a cigarette and added to the rising columns of smoke in

the room. "What do you wish to know?"

"Do you object to my calling you by your first name?"

"No." The question surprised her. John supplied the explanation.

"You are keyed up, nervous, suffering from a guilt complex. Use of first names helps create a more informal atmosphere and better co-operation." He bent his head towards Latimer. "Sam. I'm John." He inhaled. "Now, Grace, let's get down to it. I've read your official report but there are things I would like to know. Did you actually see the demonstration of hypnotism?"

"No." Grace bit her lip. "I was in the kitchen with Mary, the hostess. She was sponging my dress, Peter had spilt coffee on it. The screams came while I was talking to Mary."

"And?"

"I ran straight into the room where the others were.

Everyone was surprised and shocked. Peter was sitting where I had left him. He was screaming and his hands kept clawing at the air before him." She shuddered. "It was horrible."

"What did you do then?"

"I slapped him. At that time I did not know what had happened, but he was beginning to talk, something about dust, and I was scared. I slapped him, but he still kept screaming and shouting. Mike came over and commanded him to wake up. He did. I immediately got my dress and we left the party. I telephoned to my office and Captain Parry met us and took over. I wrote up my report, handed it in, and was summoned to appear here. That's all I know."

"Did Peter talk to you at all after you left the party?" John leaned forward. "This is important, Grace. Did he?"

"No." Even to her the lie was obvious. She wet her lips and tried again. "Some

mumbles, nothing clear. He seemed to be in a coma."

"I see." John stared at the tip of his cigarette. "Please don't bother to lie to me, Grace. Shall I tell you what happened? You managed to get Peter away from the others in good time. I'll accept that, but you simply could not stop him talking. He had to talk, he couldn't help himself. I don't know just what he said, it was probably highly disjointed, but you are an intelligent woman, and you have an agile brain." He drew slowly at his cigarette. "You know that Peter has spent some time on the Moon, don't you?"

"Yes," she admitted, and felt a great relief. "I do."

Sam let out his breath with an audible hiss.

He was shocked. Security, his personal God, had been outraged, and by a man who should have known better. He said so, not mincing his words, angry at the betrayal of the most closely-guarded

secret he knew. John heard him out with mounting incredulity.

"Are you serious? Surely you don't mean to tell me that you set Grace to watch Weston without her knowing just what it was she had to watch for?" He snorted with contempt. "Really, Sam, I thought that you had learned that trying to keep your right hand from knowing what your left was doing was a waste of time."

"Miss Roberts had her orders," snapped Latimer. "She was to stay with Weston, monitor his conversation and report to us immediately things went wrong."

"Is that all?" John glanced at the set features of the woman. She didn't blush; she had long learned how to control herself, but if she had been other than she was, her face would have been scarlet. "No temptations? No forced confidences?"

"So what if she did try to get him to talk?" Sam looked defiant. "Security just couldn't

let a man with his information walk around until we were certain that information was under lock and key." He drew at his forgotten cigarette, crushed it to a pulp when he discovered that it had gone out, lit another. "I consider what we did justifiable. In view of what happened it was fortunate we took the precautions we did."

"That was an accident," said John. "A million-to-one chance. It could never happen again."

"How can you be sure?" Latimer shook his head. "I'm sorry, John, but I'm afraid that your guinea pig has exploded in your face. Once was one time too many."

"Excessive caution does not automatically mean efficiency," said John, and knew he was making meaningless sounds. He drummed his fingers on the edge of his desk, his forehead furrowed with thought. "His conditioning wasn't strong enough," he said. "He was too far gone when you gave him to me,

practically insane. I did the best I could."

"Your best wasn't good enough," said Sam. He spoke without heat, mentioning facts rather than pushing an argument. "So you did condition him to forget. All right, the conditioning worked fine. But he was hypnotised and cracked wide open. By the time Captain Parry got to him he was ready to cry on the first shoulder offered to him. He was right back where he was two months ago when they dragged him from the dust." He stared at Grace. "If she could figure it out, then so could an enemy agent."

"He was conditioned against re-hypnosis," said John. "He should have resisted it. He would have resisted it, but he wasn't being hypnotised. He was watching someone else acting as a subject and his guard was down. He went under without even knowing what was happening to him." He appealed to Latimer. "Can't you see? It was a combination

of circumstances. The drinks, the lateness, the music. He was tired, not thinking, and he simply fell asleep. It was just bad luck that his sleep wasn't normal. It was the worst of luck that the amateur hypnotist should have ordered age-regression." He slammed his hand hard on the surface of the desk. "Damn it! Damn it all to hell!"

"Sure," said Sam. "Damn it all you like and I'll join in. But it happened and we can't forget it. Conditioned personnel cannot be regarded as a good security risk. You tried, you failed, that's all there is to it."

"Is it?" John sat and stared at the papers spread before him. They were the usual things, official forms in many colours, case histories, treatment cards, the operational paper-work of the psychopathic wards of a military hospital. But he didn't see them. He was thinking of the two hundred and thirty men stationed on the far side of the Moon.

Those men had no prospect of ever returning home. They knew that they had to stay where they were until the Security Corps could be convinced that they wouldn't talk while on Earth-leave and so betray the big secret. He had hoped that hypnotic conditioning would do the trick—what men have been ordered to forget they can't talk about—but Peter Weston, the guinea pig, had cracked and ruined the plan.

And the problem remained as before.

"I could try again," he said, and looked at Sam. "Weston was so near a success that I feel justified in demanding a second opportunity to prove that my solution could be the right one."

"No." By the tone of his voice Latimer didn't intend arguing about it.

"You have superior officers," reminded John.

"So have you." Latimer smiled with his mouth. "Don't try it, John. We may hold

the same rank, but Security tops you, and you know it. Rub the wrong fur the wrong way and you'll find yourself accused of disloyalty and thrown to the wolves." He leaned forward, his eyes sincere. "Don't do it, John. I'd hate to see you broken."

"I believe you," said John. He gnawed at his bottom lip. "When is the inquiry on Weston?"

"Tomorrow afternoon." Sam looked anxious. "No wild ideas, John."

"No." John relaxed, his mind made up, and became aware of Grace staring at him. He chuckled at her expression. "Tell her, Sam."

"You're in this right up to your pretty ears," said Latimer. "Frankly, you know too much and something has got to be done about it."

"What?" The word came through stiff lips and John wondered just what her conception of the Security Corps was. Knowing how they operated, he guessed that she knew almost nothing of the

organisation she worked for. An office to which she reported and from which she received instructions. A stiffly worded official warning as to the need for absolute secrecy and some quite unofficial, and, therefore, more lurid threats as to what would happen to her if she failed. No wonder she was terrified, hide it though she might. Weston's crack-up and his loose talk had probably convinced her that she was due for the full penalty. Sam took great delight in giving her his news.

"We have investigated you, of course, or we would never have employed you. Now that you have learned the big secret we can't let you go. So we are going to promote you, put you in a position where you can do no harm and could do a lot of good. With people who know as much or more, as you do."

"With men like Peter?" She didn't seem to relish the prospect.

"Perhaps, maybe later, but not now." Sam smiled to-

wards John. "You are to act as Major Laurance's secretary, his confidential one. Satisfied?"

"Of course." There seemed to be something on her mind. "I may be out of line in asking this, but I'd like to know." She hesitated. "It's about Peter. What happened to him?"

"Why?" Sam's voice was sharp. "What makes you ask that?"

"Relax," said John. "She asked it because she is a woman. She was very close to him for a while and the betting is that he fell in love with her. She probably feels a sense of responsibility towards him." He smiled at Grace. "Right?"

"You're not wrong, anyway." She smiled for the first time that day. "I can see that I'll have to be careful when around you. You know too much." She became serious. "What did happen to him?"

"Lobotomy," said John curtly.

He became busy with the papers on his desk.

The inquiry was held in a small room in the hospital and consisted of John, Grace, Sam, a Colonel in the Security Corps, another from the department responsible for the Moon base and a complimentary psychiatrist. The matter, as far as everyone but John was concerned, was routine. He intended to see that it turned out something a little different from that.

He sat back, relaxed in his chair, quietly smoking while Sam gave evidence. The major called Grace to repeat her testimony, the complimentary psychiatrist gave it as his professional opinion that hypnosis couldn't wholly be trusted to make a man forget his past, the Security colonel made noises as if he had known it all along.

Colonel Matheson, who wore the insignia of Special Service because that was the nearest he could get to what

he was actually doing, wasn't happy.

"So this experiment has proved a failure," he said. "Peter Weston, the subject, did not stand up to his testing. Is that correct?"

"Yes." Sam glanced at his chief, received permission to go ahead. "You have heard the evidence and read the reports. The conclusion is plain."

"And Weston? What of him?"

"Weston posed a peculiar problem," said Sam carefully. "We couldn't return him to the Moon. As an operative he was worse than useless. We couldn't set him free. Even with fresh conditioning, he could have broken at any time. When we took him he was insane. There was only one thing to do."

"Smash his mind," said John bitterly. "Slash his brain and ruin it."

"Lobotomy," said Sam quickly. "It is standard psychiatric treatment."

"It is wilful destruction of a man's intelligence," said John. He had seen the expression on Matheson's face. "It calmed him, yes, but even now we do not know if it destroyed his memory. I need hardly tell you that, unless it did, it was inexcusable. Peter Weston now has no initiative and poor concentration. He lies in his cot and stares at the ceiling, and only he and God knows what he thinks about. If he can think at all."

"Really, Major Laurance." The complimentary psychiatrist was offended. "You make us seem monsters. The lobotomy was authorised by three psychiatrists and countersigned by Security. The treatment was for the patient's own good."

"Of course." John forced himself to be calm. "The fact that it has destroyed the patient's intelligence is, naturally, an unfortunate side-effect. But even now you can't be sure that Peter Weston will not talk of things he shouldn't.

You still can't be sure that you have destroyed his memory. And you dare not turn him loose until you are sure. So what happens now?"

"There will be a period of observation," said the psychiatrist. "The patient must be watched, re-oriented, taught to take his place in society. It may take quite some time."

"Exactly." John glanced at Matheson. "In other words you have quietened him down ready for jail. A fine reception for a hero."

"Weston is a bad Security risk," snapped the colonel. "That's all there is to it."

"No." Matheson sat upright in his chair. "I can't agree with that. Your problem is to prevent anyone learning that we are building a base on the Moon. My problem is to build that base. I can't do it if you insist on treating my men as criminals or lunatics, or both. They haven't deserved that. Those men are all volunteers and they are doing a great job.

The least we can do is to treat them like human beings."

"We are aware of the problem," snapped the colonel. "Major Latimer is working in close collaboration with Major Laurance to find a solution. Weston was an experiment. If that experiment had succeeded we would have been able to release certain personnel from the Moon base for Earth leave. As things are there can be no such leave."

"Nice," said Matheson. "Would you like to go up there and tell them that?"

"Please, gentlemen!" Sam raised his voice until he had their attention. "We have met here to conduct an inquiry on Peter Weston. That inquiry is finished. I suggest we leave it at that."

"I suggest that we stop pretending the problem doesn't exist and take it out and have a look at it." John was very conscious of Sam's expression. He ignored it as he had ignored the hinted warnings. It

would be a long time before he could get enough high brass who knew all about the big secret together in one room. And he had an ally in Matheson. He could sense it.

"The problem," he said deliberately, "isn't just Peter Weston. That was only a part of it, as much a part as our rigging false explosions to account for the men who die on the Moon. The real problem, as I see it, is why they die at all."

"Yes," said Matheson. "That is the real problem."

"I disagree." The colonel was adamant. "The only problem is that we must keep the Moon base a secret. Any means are justified if used to that end."

"They are complementary," said John. "I am sure of it." He glanced at Matheson. "According to my figures, the death rate on the Moon has steadily risen. Is that correct?"

"It is." Matheson was grim. "We are having trouble finding replacements. We need

single men who are qualified both by training and willingness to undertake arduous duties. We can only take those with no relatives in the immediate service, who fulfil rigorous physical standards, and who can be cleared by Security. There aren't that many of them."

"I have also discovered that, after approximately four months, the life expectancy takes a downward curve. I can also predict that, within the next few months, over half of the personnel at present on the Moon will be dead from one cause or another." John leaned back and stared at the others. "That is a statement of simple statistical fact."

They didn't like it. No man likes to be responsible, even remotely, for the calculated deaths of more than a hundred men. Not, that is, unless they are convinced they have no choice in the matter. But it is very easy to find an excuse for doing the

unpleasant, to avoid direct responsibility and to claim expediency. So armies march to certain destruction and those that send them feel no personal blame. Men and women are executed, and the society which demands the executions do not feel guilty.

And the Moon is a long way away.

"Tragic," said the colonel. "But you could be wrong."

"I am not wrong," said John.

"You could be," insisted the colonel. He shrugged. "Even if you are right, what can we do? Those men are, in a sense, fighting a war. Casualties are to be expected when fighting a war." It was glib, too glib. The colonel had found his way to avoid responsibility. Not so Matheson.

"So they can be considered as casualties," he snapped. "All right, I'm not arguing about that, but how am I to get replacements? Your screening is so thorough that only one from every thousand

names we send you is passed for Luna Service. If I lose the men I have, how am I to build the base?"

"We daren't send potential saboteurs to the Moon," snapped the colonel. "Security knows its job." The way he said it was as if a door had slammed against all further discussion on the matter. It had.

"So we won't argue about replacements," soothed John. "But that makes it more important than ever that we should take care of the men we have. We simply cannot afford to have them die on us, not when they are so difficult to replace. The problem, as I see it, is to find some way to stop these unfortunate deaths."

"I agree." Matheson was inwardly fuming at the blank refusal of the Colonel to even consider a lowered security rating for the Moon personnel. He was also thinking of his own neck. If the Moon project folded, then he would be held responsible and, after all the money, men and mater-

ial poured into it, he would be made the scapegoat of the century. He looked hopefully at John. "You have some suggestions?"

"Yes." John relaxed and smiled at Sam, who did not smile back. He glanced at Grace, who sat, eyes wide, lips pressed together. The complimentary psychiatrist was hunched over the table, a coil of smoke rising from his cigarette, his fingers busy making doodles on a scratch pad. John coughed. He looked up, straightened, put away his pencil.

"I was thinking," he said defensively.

"Of course." John looked at Matheson. "Since the Moon project began three hundred and eighty-two men have been sent to the Moon. Now, after less than nine months, we have only two hundred and thirty. The rest, aside from Weston, are dead. Allowing that natural causes caused most of the deaths at the commencement of the project, we are still left with the fact

that the death-rate is on the increase; the suicide rate is incredible, and the losses high. Agreed?"

"Agreed." Matheson answered for them all.

"I have studied the figures and find that the death-rate is on a rising curve. To me there is only one explanation for that. I know that the equipment used is the best available, the conditions as good as can be obtained, and the morale kept as high as possible. Yet the morale is so low that there were ten suicides during the past four weeks." John lit a fresh cigarette. "It would seem that there is something very wrong on the Moon for that to happen.

"Well?" The colonel was on the defensive. "The conditions are hard, we know that, but what can we do about it?"

"We could send up a psychiatrist," said John, and paused, waiting for the storm.

He had stuck out his neck and he knew it. Security was

so touchy that, on general principles, they mistrusted sending any man where he wanted to go. They checked and double checked, screened and rescreened, but they could never be wholly sure. And the Moon project was a great big delicate egg, a soap bubble which a word to the wrong person could break.

Matheson cut through the babble.

"Major Laurance could be right," he said. "We do need a psychiatrist on the Moon." He stared at John. "Will you go?"

"Yes."

"Just a moment." Sam looked unhappy. "You'll clear security—no doubt as to that, but have you thought it all out? You can go to the Moon, yes, but only on the same conditions as the others. You go—but you don't come back."

"Why not?" Matheson was angry. "We are sending up an investigator. How can he report unless he returns? And why shouldn't he return? Damn it, he knows that we

are building a base on the Moon as well as I do."

"That isn't the point," snapped the colonel. "At the moment Major Laurance knows we are building a base on the Moon. He does not know just where that base is, how constructed, how rigged for defence and offence. If he were to talk now he could do only limited harm. Once he has seen the installations he could do unlimited harm. You see the difference?"

"Sophistry," sneered Matheson. "To me we either trust him or we don't. If we don't, then get rid of him, but if we do, then send him up to the Moon and bring him down again." He pressed his hands flat on the table and heaved himself to his feet. "That's my last word, gentlemen."

John smiled at Sam's anguished expression.

Take a rugged ball of pumice, punch it full of craters, fill those craters with

impossibly fine dust, set it in a vacuum with the lantern of Earth on one side and the burning stars on the other, provide a sun like a blow-lamp and saw-edged mountains casting inky shadows and you have the Moon. Grim, rugged, desolate as only something which has been dead for eons can be. A pitted ball of rock, rotten and crumbling by the action of opposed temperatures, the once-hard stone flaking down to molecular dust, and falling slowly to add to the deposits in the craters.

A nice place.

John thought so as he stared from the double window in the observation room. His body still ached from the beating the high acceleration had given it on his trip up from Earth. His heart still pounded at increased speed, unused as yet to the low gravity, and his tendons smarted from the over-exertion caused by the same reason. He was bruised and sick, his head ached and he

felt a touch of claustrophobia.

He wished that he were home.

A file of monsters appeared below, streaming from the airlock set into the side of the peak on which he stood. They were grotesque in their skin-tight suits, swollen helmets and bulging air tanks. They carried long rods with which they tested the ground before them and each was linked to the others by a long length of rope. They moved with exaggerated motions, walking as if in water, lifting their legs high as they moved out of view.

"Going to pick up the supplies," said Mason. He was the commander, the ultimate authority on the Moon. He stood beside John and watched the last of the men.

"Why can't they be dropped closer?" John had vivid memories of the journey from the landing grounds to the base. It had been a long walk, and he had been carried most of the way.

"Not much solid rock

around here," said Mason. "We managed to find a place where the dust was thin and the ground firm." He rubbed his cropped hair and stared at John as if daring him to make comment. He was a young man with a seamed face and old eyes. They were bright eyes, too bright, and his hands seemed to have a life of their own. They touched things, his face, his head, rubbed each other, plucked at the belt of the coveralls he wore. Commander Mason was a very nervous man.

"I see," said John. He knew that the accident of a firm landing ground wasn't the true reason for the ships dropping their supplies so far from the base. Security probably had dictated it so that the pilots, the only men who made the double journey, wouldn't know just where the installations had been built. He turned from the window and looked around the observation room.

It was small, cut from the rock and sprayed with a

thick coating of silicone plastic which provided both protection and insulation. It was a copy of the other rooms, and as bare and as utilitarian as a cell. With all supplies having to be brought from Earth everything not essential to life was classified as a luxury item, and luxury items were forbidden.

"You're a head-shrinker, aren't you?" Commander Mason was still young enough to regard slang as permissible. But his manners, like himself, had deteriorated during the nine months he had been on the Moon.

"You know who I am," said John evenly. "You've read my papers."

"Sorry." Mason looked at his hands. "Does Earth think we're all going crazy?"

"No. We are worried about your death-rate. It's high, and getting higher." John hesitated, wondering whether to force a confidence or wait until later. "I have been sent here to work with your doctor, Captain Edwards. I

hope that we can all work in close co-operation."

"Sure," said Mason. "Why not?" He rubbed at his chin, pulled at his ear, ran his fingers across his mouth. "How are things back home?"

"Much as usual."

"Are they?" Mason seemed doubtful. "No wars?"

"Of course not."

"No." Mason seemed relieved. "If there was a war the ships wouldn't still be coming, would they? I guess we're safe for a while."

"You're safe enough," said John. He glanced around the room. "Before I meet the men I'd like to get the feel of the place. Would you show me around?"

"I can't," said Mason. "I've got three teams out and have to stand by. But the Doc will act as guide. I'll take you to him."

He led the way from the room without waiting for John's answer.

"It's a beehive," said Edwards. "Or an anthill. Take

your choice; both analogies fit." Like Mason, the doctor was young—all the Moon personnel were young, but, like the commander, he seemed to have aged beyond his years. He had no nervous afflictions but spoke in a series of jerks like a man out of breath, or like a man who couldn't be bothered. He also had been on the Moon a full nine months.

John nodded, not answering, his eyes taking in the series of rooms through which the doctor led him. They were all the same aside from their purpose. All had been cut from the rock, sealed with the dun-coloured plastic and varied only in size. They were connected by short passages, some with emergency airlocks, most without.

"These are the living quarters," Edwards gestured to a section devoted to small rooms filled with tiered bunks. "We have a couple of recreation rooms, cards, dice, chess, stuff like that. A mess room where we show movies and hold

meetings, and a kitchen. The rest is for workshops, suits, and the rest of the equipment." He sounded totally disinterested in what he said.

"And beyond those doors?" John halted and gestured to a pair of thick steel doors set flush to a wall.

"That's what we're here for," said Edwards. "Back there are the missiles, the mobile launching racks, the computers for flight patterns."

He didn't elaborate, but he didn't have to. John knew why a base was being built on the Moon. Not for an observatory, not as a weather station, but as the mailed fist which would hang poised and ready to smash at the Earth. Static launching racks, underground installations and a domed city would have been nice, but vulnerable. If a rocket ship could reach the Moon, then so could a guided missile, and a few hydrogen bombs could literally change the face of the Moon. So there were no static launching racks. Instead, there was a beehive

gouged from the rock on the far side of the Moon, the side which could never be seen from Earth. There were mobile racks which could spit their missiles from any one of an infinity of points. And there were men standing, night and day, ready to man those mobile racks.

Or there would be, when the base was fully completed.

The sick bay was another dun-coloured room lined with cabinets containing drugs and instruments. An operating table occupied most of the floor space, and Edwards, with a grim attempt at brightening the place up, had fastened anatomical charts to the walls.

He sat at a low shelf which served as a desk, gestured to the only other chair, waited until John had sat down.

"How do you feel? Physically, I mean?"

"Not too bad." John winced at the ache from his overstrained tendons. "I'll get used to it."

"Naturally," said Edwards. "You'll have to." He moved several items on his desk. "I can't offer you a cigarette or a drink. No smoking because it uses air, no drinking because it uses medicinal alcohol. In fact, I can't extend any damn hospitality at all."

"It doesn't matter," said John. "I just want to talk."

"Why not? Talking's all we do now, aside from sleeping and working." Edwards leaned back. "Before you begin, let me say something. What are the people on Earth going to do about us?"

John frowned, trying to guess the other's meaning. Edwards saw the frown.

"Surely you've read my reports?"

"No." John saw the red flush begin to suffuse Edwards' sallow features. "Security would have sat on those," he explained. "It was only because I pulled strings and played politics that I'm here at all."

"The swine!" Edwards was really angry. "I've sent a full report on the situation up here—sent more than one, and they do nothing!"

"They sent me," said John.

"What can you do?" Edwards wasn't being insulting, he was merely suffering from frustration. "I asked them to send books, pictures, handicraft tools. I wanted materials for occupational therapy, something to start hobbies, get the men to making things with their hands so that they could get their minds off what's outside. I even asked for cigarettes, liquor, women." He chuckled. "I knew that I wouldn't get any women."

"No," said John. "No, you wouldn't get women." He leaned forward. "Is it that bad?"

"It's hell," said Edwards simply. "I'm low on drugs, and the men are low on patience. The movies are worn out and we've nothing to replace them. So the men sit and talk and grumble and

fight. Sometimes they fight, but I'm not worried about that. It's when they go into corners and look at the walls that I'm worried." Edwards clenched his hand and looked at his fist. "Ten suicides last month. Five men lost in the dust." The fist thudded on the edge of the shelf. "What the hell are they trying to do to us down there?"

John couldn't answer.

The suit was hot, too hot, and the cumbersome boots didn't help. He moved cautiously, walking in the footprints left by the others, the long rod in his hand prodding at the dust and the hiss of air from his helmet tanks loud in his ears. He was alone, yet not quite alone. Other men, monstrous in their suits, moved before him and, from the radio, he could hear the sounds of their breathing and muttering.

It was the muttering which alarmed him.

The radio should have echoed to conversation, idle

gossip, songs, the sounds men make when together on the march. The radio was the only real link between them. The suits, the ropes, the sight of the others could not give any real comfort. Men had been accustomed to an environment where the air was full of sounds, but here, in the vacuum, John felt more alone than if he were at the bottom of the sea.

Deliberately, he tried an experiment.

They were walking along a narrow ledge running beside a smooth expanse of featureless dust. It looked almost like a trapped cloud of cigarette smoke, molecular fine, filling the bowl of the crater from rim to rim. John looked at it, at the men before him, and closed his mind to what he was doing and what he was. Instead, he concentrated on achieving an empathy with the men who had spent a long time on the Moon.

It wasn't easy, but it was a trick he had learned a long time ago, when he realised

that before he could help a patient he had to find out what was wrong with him. Not his physical symptoms, but the mental attitude towards them. How could he tell a mentally deranged person what was wrong with him unless he, too, felt the same way? So he had practised and concentrated until, briefly, he had seen with the patient's eyes, felt the things he felt, become, as far as he could, a carbon copy of the person he was trying to help.

He did it now.

Major John Laurance, psychiatrist, temporary visitor to the Luna Station, dwindled, and John Laurance, worker, took his place.

He had been here a long time, a long, long time. He had grown tired of the cell-like rooms, the tasteless food, the same faces. He wanted to smell growing things, mingle with strangers, talk to women. He wanted to get back to his own kind.

But he couldn't!

He didn't know when he would be allowed to board the rocket to take him home. At first he had wanted to be here, a hero, a man who had set foot on other worlds. It would be something to tell the people back home, his father, mother, his kid brother. He would be able to point to the Moon and tell them that he'd actually trodden its surface.

But he couldn't!

The gravity no longer bothered him. He had become used to the one-sixth Earth normal and had learned not to over-exert himself. But now that he didn't use his full strength his muscles were shrinking. He would like to build them up again, feel strong and fit as he had when he had first arrived, so that when he returned home he would be a giant among men. But even if he didn't fully recover his strength it wouldn't matter. People would understand when he told them where he had been.

But he couldn't!

He hated the place. He

hated the cold stars, so distant, so mocking. He hated the men he worked with; he knew them too well. He hated the pap they served as food, the lack of all civilised comforts. He hated the not knowing when it would all be over. Even a murderer serving a life sentence knew roughly when he would be released. The worst criminal could cross off the days and know that each one so crossed took him nearer to the day when he would be free.

But he couldn't!

John sighed and muttered something, and his eyes stared from the stars to the smooth sea at his side. It was tempting that sea, so soft, so inviting. It would be nice to plunge right into it, away from everything he hated, right away . . .

The dust closed over his head like a cloud of smoke.

"You were lucky." Commander Mason rubbed his cropped hair, scowled at the observation window and sat

down. "Not in getting pulled out—the lines took care of that, but that you kept your head. Most of the guys who fall in the dust come out as nutty as fruit cakes."

"And some don't come out at all." John glanced at Edwards, the third occupant of the room. "Five last month, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"How is that if everyone is fastened together?"

"Not everyone goes out in parties," explained Mason. "And even if they do, sometimes they get careless of their lines. They unhitch, try some fancy jumping, and one of them misses his aim. If that happens and he hits the dust . . ." He made an expressive gesture.

John nodded. When he had fallen in the dust he had at first felt nothing but contentment. It was like falling through smoke, so fine was the dust. Then had come fear, the terrible fear of being literally buried alive. For a

few moments he had clawed and struggled with the molecular-fine dust, then sense had returned, and logic, and he had remembered the line hooked to his waist.

But even now he felt the sweat of fear as he remembered his panic.

"What made you go in the dust?" Edwards leaned forward. He was no fool. "Was it deliberate?"

"Not consciously." John hesitated. "I tried an experiment and it worked only too well. I'll take a gamble that those men you lost in the dust were unconscious suicides. They wanted to escape, die, if you prefer the term, and so they neglected elementary precautions designed for their safety. It is a common enough phenomenon. A person suffering from a guilt complex will seek to punish himself by bumping against things, stepping into traffic, taking insane chances. I've often wondered just how many 'accidents' are caused that way."

"I know what you mean," said Edwards. "It's all in my reports." He made an expression as if he had tasted something unpleasant. "Those beautifully worked out reports that no one has bothered to read."

"I don't get this," said Mason. He looked at John. "You've been here a month now. You've looked all over, talked with the men, ate, slept, lived with them. You've run tests and gone outside. You've even been in the dust. Has it done any good?"

"You've had no deaths since I've been here, have you?"

"No," admitted Mason. "But that's because you are walking around asking questions. The men know you've come up from Earth and they're waiting for you to tell them when they can expect to go home." He rubbed at his scalp. "I don't like to think of what may happen after you've gone."

"Neither do I," said John seriously. He glanced at Ed-

wards. "I think you know what's wrong up here as well as I do. Am I right?"

"I can make a guess," said the doctor. "General adaptation syndrome."

John nodded, then smiled at Mason's expression. "Shop talk, commander. Don't let it get you. The general adaptation syndrome is just a fancy name for a simple thing. If I said that the men had reached breaking point, would that make it clearer?"

"I could have told you that myself."

"I know, but it isn't as simple as that." John stared at his hands, wishing that he could smoke, and knowing how useless the wish was. "If you take a man and put him in an environment not his own, he will adapt to his new surroundings. If the change isn't too great he will adapt all the way and be happy. If the change is too great, then he will adapt as far as he can for as long as he can—and then he will break

down. And he will not be happy. In fact, he will be very, very unhappy. The adaptation, of course, is both mental and physical."

"I follow," said Mason.

"If we restore the original environment, then the subject will recover. It is as if the human mind and body were an elastic band. It can stretch so far comfortably. It can stretch much further uncomfortably. But when stretched too far for too long it will snap." John snapped his fingers. "Like that. When that happens the organism, the man, seeks escape. He either escapes in a physical sense, by running away; in a mental sense, by going insane, or in a total sense, by dying. If he cannot run away he will develop psychosomatic illness. If he still cannot escape, then he will become insane." He looked at the commander. "I am assuming that, in order to commit suicide, a man is, by definition, insane."

"Do you believe that?" said Edwards.

"By definition, a man who kills himself must be insane," said John. "He is not-normal; who is not-normal is insane. Q.E.D."

"Forget definitions and careful phraseology." The doctor was becoming irritated. "Do you believe that men who commit suicide are insane?"

"Sometimes, yes, in the sense that they don't know what they are doing. In the problem that confronts us, no; they know exactly what they are doing. They are escaping from an unbearable environment, and they are doing it in the only truly effective way there is." John shrugged. "I'm not going to differentiate between the conscious and the sub-conscious volition. Those who jump in the dust are obviously unconscious suicides; those who cut their throats, conscious. It makes no difference to the end result."

"I see," said Mason heavily. His hands moved about his scalp and face as if with a

life of their own. "So we know what's wrong with us. Fine. Now what do we do about it?"

That, as John had known all along, was the big question.

It was one he could not answer, because there was no real answer. What do you do with an unsuitable environment? Change it, obviously. How? Knowing the answer did not provide the solution. Not when every suggestion would be met with the iron refusal of Security.

Regular Earth-leave for the personnel. Public adulation of the space travellers as heroes. High pay and short shifts so as to make the lonely hell of the Moon worthwhile. Something to look forward to just when the reaction set in. More comfort, family domes with married couples working as a team, smoking, drinking, a social life. Radio contact with Earth . . .

All good suggestions, all

damned because they violated the big secret.

John thought about it for the next week. He thought of nothing else. It wasn't a case of palliatives; it was a case of relieving the tension so that men could live away from their home planet. It wasn't enough to supply air and water and food. Men weren't machines and they required more than that. They required the peace of mind to meet the altered bodily conditions. And that peace of mind could never come while they were stranded a quarter of a million miles away from home, knowing that they would stay there until they rotted, or until someone, somewhere, decided that they were to be trusted.

And this was the thing which hurt most of all.

Patriotism is a fine thing, and so is loyalty. The Moon personnel were both patriotic and loyal; if they weren't they would never have been selected. But they were intelligent and human, and no intelligent human likes to

think that he has been taken for a fool. Their emotions had been used to trap them. They were wanted for the very things later denied. Trust a man so far and you should be willing to trust him all the way.

Security hadn't done that. They had picked the most loyal men they could find, sent them to hell, and then slammed the door because they couldn't be trusted.

It was, John thought, the surest way to breed conflict and discontent ever devised.

But there was no way out. You couldn't have total security and adulation. You couldn't let the personnel wander loose and boast of what they had done, and at the same time deny that they had done it. You couldn't recruit more personnel with glittering promises coupled with dangerous, arduous work, and then say that it was all a hoax. You couldn't, in effect, have your cake and eat it.

When the time came for

John to board the rocket for home, he still couldn't see any way out.

Mason spoke about it before he left.

"What shall I tell them after you've gone?" The commander's hands twitched worse than before. "They'll expect to hear something definite, and I've fed them all the lies and excuses I'm going to. Now it's your turn, yours and those back home."

"I'm making certain recommendations," said John carefully. He knew that the man he spoke to was not wholly sane. "I'm going to impress the need for Earth-leave, even in some isolated spot where the men can enjoy themselves without risk of being overheard. I'll recommend more comforts and . . ."

"Get the leave and you can forget the rest," interrupted Mason. "We can do without the candies and magazines, the cigarettes and comic books. Just let us get home again, that's all."

"Yes," said John. "I know how you feel."

He did know, and on the way to the rocket he could think of nothing else. Gratefully, he skinned off the tight suit, passed it to the landing party, settled back as the pilot warmed his jets.

Home! Soon he would be there. Soon he would see sky and cloud, and green things, instead of the harsh pumice and dust seas of the dead satellite. He hadn't needed to see the commander's expression to know how he felt. Mason had reminded him too much of a favour. A favour that should have been his right.

The rockets opened up, the mattress pressed hard against his back, the gyros whined, and they were off in a shower of flame and swirling dust.

Towards home.

He was met by three men and a car. Neither of them spoke and he was given no chance to look around. The

ship had landed in desert, John could tell that, but in which desert, and at which "testing ground," he couldn't tell. They had landed in the dark and, as the car droned into the night, he dozed, lolling on the cushions, reliving the thrust and pressure of deceleration, the roar of remembered rockets in his ears.

At dawn his guards—he thought of them as nothing else—escorted him to a hotel room. It was a small place and the rooms were ordinary, but compared to those he had just left it represented the height of luxury. He bathed in steaming water, hoping to soak some of the ache from his bones, knowing that only time would again accustom him to the higher gravity of Earth normal.

He slept, woke to eat, and slept again. At dusk they continued their journey, arriving at the hospital at evening.

Sam met them, took charge, escorted John to a private room. "You'd better wash

up and get ready," he said. "The inquiry's been held up waiting for your arrival."

"So soon?" John was surprised. He had at least expected time to make out his report. "What's the hurry?"

"Get washed," said Sam. He stepped towards the door.

"Wait a minute." John stepped forward and caught the other by the arm. He had to remember to close his grip; his muscles were still weak. "What's going on? I was met by three goons who treated me as if I were a prisoner. They didn't tell me anything and I didn't ask. Now you start acting the same way. Why, Sam? Why?"

"Don't you know?" There was no mistaking the expression in Latimer's eyes.

"No." John stared at the man he had thought to be his friend. "Are you still sore because I manœuvred myself up to the Moon? Is that it?"

"Maybe." Sam jerked his arm free. "Get ready. The reception committee is waiting for you."

It was, John thought, almost as if he had never left. The colonel sat in the same chair. The complimentary psychiatrist doodled on his pad. Matheson, frowning and worried, glowered at the cigar he was smoking. Even Grace was there, a stenographer's pad before her. She smiled towards him as John sat down. She was the only one.

"All right, Laurance." The colonel was making an obvious effort to retain his anger. "Suppose you tell us just why you did it?"

"Did what?" John looked from one to the other. He spoke to Matheson. "I assume you're talking about my trip to the Moon. In that case, the question is ludicrous. You know why I went."

"I know why you were sent," corrected Matheson. He hesitated, wanting to ask the obvious questions, and yet, for some reason, holding back. He made up his mind. "How are things up there?"

"Bad." John felt in his

pockets. He had no cigarettes, and Grace, seeing his gesture, passed him her package. He lit one, coughed over the smoke, then mastered himself. "As I suspected, the entire Moon personnel is suffering from the adaption syndrome. A change of environment is the only cure. Palliatives may help for a time, but the problem will remain." He glanced at the cigarette. "I had hoped for time to make out my report."

"You can do that later." The colonel glanced at the complimentary psychiatrist. "Well?"

"It fits. Major Laurance is a man who will always try to find a solution to any problem which confronts him. He mingled with the Moon personnel and would have slipped into empathy with them. In such a case the association of identity would have precluded him from retaining a detached viewpoint. What affected them would affect him. He would regard his suggestions, not as treason, but as simple

survival." The psychiatrist spread his hands. "I am not excusing him, you understand, merely explaining."

"He's a traitor," snapped the colonel. He glared at John. "Well, why did you do it?"

"I can't answer that question," said John. His respiration was faster than normal and his hands trembled a little. Sam thought that he was afraid, but the psychiatrist knew better. The symptoms were those of anger, not fear. "I can't answer because I don't know what you are talking about." He appealed to Matheson. "What am I supposed to have done?"

Matheson picked up a sheaf of papers and threw them towards him.

They consisted of reports, newspaper clippings, eyewitness accounts and a wealth of speculation. They were tabulated, cross-indexed and utterly damning—if they were true.

And John knew that there could be no mistake about that.

He read them swiftly, flicking the pages as he scanned the type. He read them, checked the dates, re-checked them, and sat back.

"You will notice that the first observations were made three weeks ago," said Latimer quietly. "Two weeks after you arrived on the Moon. The reports are from sources all over the world, and their authenticity cannot be questioned." He swallowed. "Why, John? Why did you do it?"

"I didn't."

"But . . ."

"How suspicious can we get?" said John. He pushed at the heap of reports. "Lights and activity have been spotted on the Moon. We are on the Moon. Therefore, we must have produced the lights and activity. A schoolboy would know better than to argue like that."

"The activity was only

observed after you had landed at Luna Station. It seems logical to assume that you were trying to find a solution to the problem you found there." Matheson sounded very tired. "Betray our presence and the need for secrecy is over. It would solve the problem, but it makes you and those men up there guilty of treason."

"We are not guilty of treason," said John. He was very calm and he had lost his anger. Instead, he felt only amusement and a great relief.

He knew just what had happened.

It had happened because it had to happen. The Moon hung in the sky like a swollen peach waiting to be bitten. Technology among the nations was at a fairly close level. What one nation had done another could do. They had done it.

It was as simple as that.

"Tell me." John stared at the colonel. "Do you know just where the base is?"

"No."

"Do any of you? Matheson? Sam?" John ignored the psychiatrist and Grace. They couldn't know. Sam didn't know but Matheson did. He nodded.

"Then hasn't something struck you as odd? The activity reported on the Moon isn't anywhere near the position of our base. It's almost diametrically opposite."

"That means nothing." The colonel was stubborn. "You would have taken elementary precautions. It would have been simple for the men to have moved away from their base."

"Simple!" John thought of the rocks, the Sun, the seas of dust. He shook his head. "The Moon is two thousand miles in diameter. To reach the reported positions would have meant a journey of at least three thousand miles over some of the roughest terrain imaginable. We didn't make that journey."

"Then?" Matheson looked startled.

"We are no longer alone on the Moon." John relaxed, knowing that he had found the answer to the big problem. "Take your minds away from the old-maid complex. There are no traitors under your bed. Instead, another nation has reached the Moon. They aren't as subtle as we are, or perhaps they are even more subtle, but, either way, it doesn't matter. They are building their base in full view of Earth. That accounts for your observed activity."

"I don't believe it!" The colonel was shocked. "It's a trick, it must be."

"You could be right," said John, and became serious. "It possibly is a trick, but not quite as you suppose. It's no trick on the part of our people to arouse interest on the Moon so that we will be forced to acknowledge them. But it could be a trick to make us admit that we are on the Moon. In fact, there is nothing else we can do. The secret, the big secret, is something which we simply dare not

keep a moment longer than we have to."

"No!" Security, the desire for complete secrecy, dictated Sam's denial.

"Yes," said John. He picked up his cigarette, drew at it, rested it carefully on the ash tray. "The newspapers have got hold of the news and everyone will know, or knows already, that men have reached the Moon. Our people are aggressive and we have a near-free press. It won't be long before the people, via the press, are demanding why we aren't up there, too. We are a democracy, our politicians need votes to stay in power, and the present government must reveal the fact that we are on the Moon in order to save its own political hide." John picked up the cigarette again. "You want more reasons?"

"I want more proof," snapped the colonel. "How is it that this other party wasn't seen by our own people?"

"I've told you, they are over three thousand miles away." John shrugged. "Their ships were probably disguised, as ours are. High test rockets for weather research, things like that. If you want to know who is on the Moon, ask Intelligence to tell you who has been financing a big guided-missile, high-altitude rocket programme. Or, better still, send up a delegation and ask them yourself."

"I . . ." The colonel was still doubtful. He couldn't be anything else. Security, to him as to Sam, meant a continual denial of information. The big secret had been important for so long that he found it almost impossible to accept the fact that it was a secret no longer. He wanted to deny the observed reports, turn them into a three-day wonder, throw a scare into the newspapers and muzzle the radio. Deny it and it doesn't exist. Don't talk about it and it won't exist. The creed of all who believed in gags and blinkers.

Not so Matheson.

"We can check," he said. "We'll have to. At first we all believed that you were playing some trick. It seemed too obvious, too raw, but it would have been effective." He smiled. "Damn effective."

"Of course." John daren't tell them that he had thought about it, had been tempted by it, and then had discarded it. Persuading men to become traitors was too dangerous. But Matheson was right; it would have worked. For the trouble with a secret is that the one who shares it obtains power. While the Moon personnel were at the mercy of Security, yet Security was at the mercy of the Moon personnel. For the men on the Moon could, at any time, have revealed their presence to a watching Earth.

"I'm glad it's over," said Matheson. "Once we release the news we'll have all the volunteers we want. We can arrange Earth-leave and stop the death-rate. We can send

up more supplies and make the Luna Service something to be proud of."

"Yes," said John. He had thought of something. "We can even release Weston."

He relaxed back in his chair, smiling, then became aware that Grace was looking at him and smiling, too. He winked and reached for her cigarettes.

He felt happy, contented, just as he did when at the conclusion of a successful course of treatment and a patient left his office to commence a new life. But, as he knew, the solution to the problem was not his doing.

For there are only three ways to deal with a secret. It can be denied that the secret exists at all. Or it can be admitted, but no one allowed to talk about it. But by far the best and sanest way was to make it something no longer secret at all.

Which was just what the strangers on the Moon had done.

A topical article on one of our interplanetary neighbours.

The Martian Enigma

by A. E. ROY, B.Sc., Ph.D., F.S.A.S., F.B.I.S.

IN SEPTEMBER OF THIS YEAR the planet Mars will be nearer the Earth than it has been for the past thirty-two years. This close approach of the planet will bring it to a distance of 35,000,000 miles, giving astronomers a first-class opportunity for solving problems that have intrigued the imagination of mankind for seventy-five years.

Since the planet moves about the Sun in 687 days it appears in our night skies every alternate year, but because of the eccentricity of its orbit, these approaches vary in distance by as much as 27,000,000 miles, the time between two closest approaches being about 16 years.

Mars has been studied intensively since the invention of the astronomical telescope

by Galileo in 1610, so that a great deal of information is known about its surface features, its atmosphere and even about Martian meteorology, no mean feat when one considers that even in a telescope using a magnification of 1,000, the apparent size of the planet is only that of the Moon seen through binoculars.

When viewed through a telescope, we see a disc showing distinct surface features of various colours. In particular, there are the white polar caps, also greenish-brown markings superimposed on a more general ruddy-coloured background. The planet rotates on its axis in 24 hours 37 minutes, not much different from the length of our own day. The exact length is now known to

within a few hundredths of a second, for astronomers have drawings of the planet, made by Huygens and Hooke more than two centuries ago, that show the main marking Syrtis Major still visible today.

Because the Martian day is so similar in length to the Tellurian one, an observer of Mars, viewing a marking near the centre of the disc one night, will see it the following night, at the same time, in almost the same spot. The slight difference in length will cause the marking to slip slowly back, disappearing round the edge after some days to reappear over the opposite edge some 40 days later.

Other changes occur in the aspect the planet presents to us. The dark markings show seasonal changes in colour; the polar caps shrink and swell, one growing while the other is diminishing in a manner analogous to the behaviour of the Earth's polar caps.

The Martian equatorial plane is inclined to the plane of the orbit of Mars at almost the same angle as the

Earth's equatorial plane is inclined to the ecliptic, so the seasons on Mars should be similar to our own, though twice as long. This deduction finds confirmation in the changes in the Martian pole caps, also in the colour changes in the dark areas. In the northern hemisphere, as the winter gives way to the Martian spring, the pole cap, which had extended almost half way to the equator, begins to shrink until, by late summer, it is only a few hundred miles across. At the end of the summer it begins to reform. Often white patches will appear in advance of the main cap, perhaps on higher ground, to be overtaken by, and merge with, the spreading material. In the southern hemisphere a similar cycle of events takes place with a phase difference of six Martian months.

Astronomers now agree that the pole caps are composed of snow and ice, though their depths may be much less than the depths of Earth's pole caps. Probably most of a hemisphere's water supply is locked up in the polar region

and is periodically released. This water, with the warmer weather, enables the seasonal changes in the dark markings to take place.

At the end of the last century it was suggested that these changes are due to the growth and decay of vegetation, and this explanation is generally accepted, though at times other less probable hypotheses have been put forward. What the vegetation is composed of is not certain, though in recent years the astronomer has gathered some spectroscopic evidence suggesting that the plants resemble mosses and lichen. This is interesting, since they are among our hardiest plants, being the most suitable to sustain life in the rigorous climate of Mars. Indeed, Russian astronomers and botanists have shown recently that terrestrial plants, growing at higher altitudes and lower temperatures, have spectra resembling quite closely those of the Martian dark areas.

The temperatures experienced on the planet have been measured by the radiometer at Lowell and Mt. Wilson

observatories. In equatorial regions the temperature can reach 50 degrees Fahrenheit or more about noon, while at sunrise and sunset the temperature is well below freezing. There are about 126 degrees of frost within the polar caps. This rigor of climate is accentuated by the thinness of the Martian atmosphere. In recent years efforts have been made to estimate more accurately the depth and composition of this atmosphere. That an atmosphere of considerable extent exists is certain. On many occasions astronomers have observed clouds, fogs and haze floating in the Martian atmosphere. Wright, in 1924, photographed the planet using colour screens. One screen allowed the passage of red light; the other allowed only violet light to pass. Since red light is relatively unaffected by haze, the surface details on Mars were registered clearly on this photograph; the violet photograph, on the other hand, revealed no surface detail, since the violet light was scattered by the Martian atmosphere. The violet image was, indeed, larger than the red image,

showing the depth of the atmosphere.

When we consider the composition of this atmosphere we are on very uncertain ground. The main constituents of our own atmosphere are oxygen, nitrogen, water vapour and carbon dioxide. In 1947, the American astronomer, Kuiper, showed by spectroscopic means that some carbon dioxide is present in the Martian air. The behaviour of the pole caps tells us that there is water vapour, though probably far less than the amount in the Earth's atmosphere, since there are no oceans or lakes of any size on Mars. In 1925, Adams and St. John found some traces of oxygen, but there cannot be more than a few per cent. of the quantity of oxygen the terrestrial air possesses. It is quite likely that Mars' oxygen supply is almost completely locked up in the oxidised Martian deserts. How much nitrogen is present is still anybody's guess. An estimate of 15 per cent. of the Earth's atmospheric pressure at sea level for the pressure of the

air at the surface of Mars is probably not too far out.

It was in 1877, at a close approach of the planet, that Schiaparelli began the famous controversy of the canals of Mars that has lasted till the present day, and may well be settled this year. His announcement that he had seen a network of long straight lines crossing the desert regions made other astronomers turn their telescopes to the planet. W. H. Pickering, in 1892, discovered small dark spots related to the canal system and also noted the presence of similar canals in the dark areas. Other observers, of equal competence and using equally good telescopes, failed to detect the canal system though they have seen short, diffuse hazy lines connecting some of the black spots.

The man who, more than anyone else, brought the canal theory to the notice of the civilised world was Dr. Percival Lowell. He believed that the canals formed a complex, geometrical network covering the whole surface of the planet, reaching both pole caps. The canal junctions,

called oases, were about 85 miles in diameter, as many as 14 canals ending at some of them. The canals for the most part seemed to lie along great circles of the planet's surface. By 1914, Lowell and his co-workers had mapped and named hundreds of canals and oases. Lowell, from a study of his collection of drawings, decided that the visibility of the canals varied with the size of the pole caps. The melting of a pole cap darkened the canals in the vicinity, and this darkening spread like a wave along the canals to the equator, crossing it some 50 days after the change began. Six Martian months later a similar "wave of quickening" proceeded from the other pole cap as that region released its watersupply.

Lowell finally came to the conclusion that the whole system was artificial, a set of irrigation channels constructed by intelligent creatures to conserve and distribute the sparse water supply. The dark lines, which must have been about 20 miles wide, were not the canals themselves but the strips of vegetation

bordering them. The oases were centres of life in which the Martians lived.

While many other astronomers join Lowell in seeing to some extent a canal system, even drawing the canals in substantially the same places, they interpret their findings differently, some believing the canals are cracks in the Martian surface caused by the bombardment of the planet by debris from the asteroid belt. Others have tried to form alternative theories to the vegetation theory of the dark areas. One such hypothesis, by Arrhenius, likened these areas to alkali flats saturated with soluble salts that absorbed or gave out water, changing colour in the process. But support for the vegetation theory is stronger than ever; it explains all the facts. One point in its favour, recently put forward by Professor Opik, was that, unless the dark areas did consist of vegetation, they would have long ago been covered by the Martian dust storms.

Most other prominent observers of the planet have drawn canals, not as fine

straight lines, but as diffuse streaks. The Mars Section of the British Astronomical Association, founded in 1890, has studied the planet since that date. Among its members was E. M. Antoniadi, director of the Section from 1896-1917. He stated, in his report of 1896, that all the observers saw canals, though their descriptions and drawings varied from observer to observer. Some drew narrow hard lines, others sketched in irregular diffuse markings. It is worthwhile quoting one of the most capable of these observers, P. B. Molesworth. "The canals vary from large, broad, well-defined markings . . . down to the faintest streaks . . . What has struck me most . . . is that almost all the canals appeared as streaks and not as lines."

An observer of the present day, Dr. Kuiper, who has studied Mars through the 82-inch McDonald Observatory telescope, states that he has never seen a long, narrow canal. He is personally convinced that the fine detail has been wrongly interpreted by the older observers.

Yet, in a paper published

last year in the Publications of the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, Wells A. Webb, in a new and ingenious investigation of Lowell and Trumpler's drawings of the canal system, strengthens the case for its artificial nature.

Webb considered various types of networks found in nature. He took sets of shrinkage cracks in lava rocks in California, also the complex system of cracks in the glaze of old chinaware and counted the percentage of cracks emerging from junctions where three cracks met, four cracks, five cracks and so on. He found in each case that about 75 per cent. of the cracks came from points where three lines met, about 22 per cent. came from points where four lines met, and a very small percentage came from points where five or more lines met.

His next step was to take networks constructed by living creatures—spiders and human beings. The spider's webs, even of different species, all had about 95 per cent. of lines emerging from points at which four lines met and very few per cent. of lines emerging from

points at which three, five or more lines met. The human networks were the railway systems of Ohio and Iowa. Here, a minority of lines came from junctions of three lines, about half came from four-line junctions and a good proportion emerged from points at which five or more lines met. Thus, the statistical curves of the living creature networks were different from those of the networks arising naturally.

When Webb considered the maps of the Martian canal system drawn by Lowell and Trumpler he found that they gave the same statistical curve as the railway networks had done, being typical of networks constructed by intelligent creatures!

Thus, the problem remains unsolved. The difficulty of observing the faint detail of Mars is undoubtedly due to the fact that the astronomer is trying to observe something at the limit of human vision through a constantly shifting atmosphere that distorts and shifts the image. In the split seconds of good steady viewing, he must note the faint detail, register it in his mind

where it inevitably is interpreted in the light of past experience. Up till now, in this field photography has lagged behind the human eye, coupled to the human brain, in efficiency. The turbulence of the Earth's atmosphere has blurred the faint detail of the image as a time exposure was taken. But the astronomers, as they wait for Mars to draw near to the Earth in 1956, have two new weapons in their armoury, the 200-inch Hale telescope and the electron-telescope. The Hale telescope can take a photograph of Mars in a fraction of a second. It is hoped to attach a cine-camera to the telescope this summer, taking hundreds of pictures of the planet. During the moments of "good seeing," when the air is still, some of the frames should register perfect pictures of Mars. Again, the electron-telescope (see *Authentic*, August, 1955), using equipment similar to the image-orthicon tube used in TV cameras, will be used to amplify the faint telescopic image of Mars, thus enabling split-second exposure photographs to be taken.

Man is a rover and a conqueror
ever, as man himself has learned to
his cost. But men can defend
themselves against other men.
And aliens?

THE HIDDEN POWER

by H. Phillip Stratford

HOLDING THE SILK-tasselled tray in two hands, Shaklane lifted his personal goblet, a Joy Gift from home, and poured into its crystal rotundity a lavish portion of Earth coffee. He kept the annoyance out of his voice as he waved the coffee pot towards the tall windows for emphasis and said: "Out there, Halloran, we have a problem that might, if I allowed it, destroy this entire planet."

The Earthman shifted uncomfortably on his chair. Shaklane, watching, was amused. These loud-mouthed barbarians grew obnoxiously awkward among the trappings of culture; but for all his

race's detestation of anything Terran, he himself could see the other side of that emotion. If the Terrans had been more Fa'rudin in mental capacity, for example——

He sighed, and said: "You are new here, Halloran. Remember, I will not allow trouble."

Shaklane's voice pattered round the difficult Earth consonants like rainwater after a storm. He replaced the coffee pot without looking away from Halloran, and the bushy Earthman moved lumberingly under the scrutiny.

"We'll get along," Halloran said, "Your Excellency."

Shaklane permitted himself a small smile. He was amused

at the Terrestrial's typical euphemism; it could mean anything Halloran wanted. The inner problem of the conflict that was so obvious on Sanda'ule—which the Earth people persisted in calling New Eden—was to ensure that what Halloran wanted was what Shaklane also desired.

"I sincerely trust we shall—get along," he said quietly. He drank slowly from his goblet and at the same time proffered the tray. It was amusing, and not a little edifying, to see the way the Earthman tried to keep his composure. Halloran's eyes flicked from the two hands holding the tray to the hand raised in a graceful gesture of hospitality to the hand just taking the goblet away from wet lips. Shaklane allowed his smile to broaden; the Earthman could not guess its cause.

Halloran spoke a trifle faster than he perhaps wanted to, covering up that fractional loss of composure.

"Last night's disturbance will not occur again," he said. "I've already dealt with the offenders."

Shaklane's heavy-lidded eyes betrayed no emotion, no reaction, nothing to show how lightly he valued the

Earthman's pledge. There would always be trouble on Sanda'ule, as long as the Earth people murmured of their rights and privileges. From his knowledge of alien psychology he knew that Earthmen could never conceive of themselves as a ruled minority. But, by the authority invested in him as governor of this planet, he was pledged to keep them just that; a new and trifling element in the galactic pattern that had swept Sanda'ule into the Empire. It might be a wise move to impress this Halloran with his own unimportance.

Shaklane said: "The Fa'rudin Empire is a benevolent overlord, Halloran. We have a complete solar system—twelve planets—given over entirely to the study of galactic intercourse. We settled here on Sanda'ule long before the cruisers of Earth were within a hundred light years. This is our planet. Your people, living here under our sufferance, will conform to Fa'rudin law." Shaklane put the tray down, rose to his feet, walked calmly towards the tall window. He turned to face Halloran, who was regarding him uncertainly, and finished with a warmly calculated smile: "I am perfectly

confident that we will, as you phrase it, get along. It will be to both our advantages."

Halloran wet his lips. He said: "Fa'rudin law doesn't always tie in with Earth law."

"On Sanda'ule, Halloran, Fa'rudin law is the only law that matters." He allowed that thought to lie on the air, and in that silence the door chimes tinkled sweetly, like a child's first present on Joy-giving. "Come!" Shaklane said.

Chesquin, his aide, came in. His high-ridged face was held in the same mask of composure that ruled all the men of Fa'rudin in the presence of aliens.

Chesquin said: "Operative One Four is waiting, Your Excellency." He used the liquid Lower Fa'rudin, with its clear flowing run and abruptly unexpected glottals.

"I will see him in five minutes." Shaklane waved Chesquin out and turned to Halloran. He said, in English: "I am not interested in the affair of last night. I would ask you to remember that you have been chosen by your people as their representative. I would impress on you very strongly that I deplore any derogatory reports that it might be my duty to transmit

to my government. Should they feel it necessary, they might very well decide to request your government to withdraw your people from Sanda'ule. I need hardly point out the hardships such a step would involve."

Halloran's grin was very white. He swallowed twice.

"I shall see to it, Your Excellency, that further trouble is prevented."

After the Earthman had gone, very straight of back, Shaklane sighed and poured himself another goblet of coffee. If every Terrestrial was to die tomorrow, one thing they had brought to the Galaxy would go on. He sweetened the coffee liberally and rang for Chesquin.

His aide appeared at once, ushering in a figure enveloped in the voluminous, inter-racial cloak common on Sanda'ule. The man's face was full-fleshed, yet his eyes held an un-focused, embarrassing look that brought Shaklane's distaste for the methods he was forced to adopt to the surface of his mind, and set a quirk of self-repugnance along his lips.

"Your Excellency," the man said.

"Your report?" Shaklane leant against the window

ledge, seeming, from the lazy afternoon sunshine agleam outside, to gather a fresh strength to support him against the dark intrigues that brewed in his office.

“The agent threw his cloak back. He only had two arms.

“Last night ten Earthmen were killed and a number wounded when a meeting of the Freedom Party was broken up by Halloran’s police.” The man stopped and looked furtively at Shaklane. “Your pardon, Your Excellency. By Halloran’s thugs.”

“The only police on Sanda’ule are those of Fa’rudin,” Shaklane nodded in agreement. “Go on.”

“They—that is, the Freedom Party—demanded that Earthmen should have elected representatives on the planetary council. They instanced the representatives of the Palladians and the Zorhani. If other aliens sit on the council, why should not those councils have an Earthman?” The spy’s eyes gleamed, and then looked away as they met the clear gaze of Shaklane.

“And do you know why not?”

“Earth has not yet the stature of a galactic culture,” the man said, as if by rote.

“Do you believe that?”

“Would I be here if I did?” There was almost, Shaklane realised with approval, a touch of defiance.

“Go on.”

The man pulled his lower lip in a mannerism that Shaklane recognised as denoting cupidity in Terrestrials.

“There was the little matter of payment——”

“You will receive the price of your hire.” Shaklane allowed some of the contempt to flow into his words. “You have the word of a noble of Fa’rudin.”

“Well, then, they’re expecting a man from Earth. All the blessed way from Earth! He’s some sort of Terran Government man. The whole ghetto is excited.”

Shaklane could share that excitement with the swarming midges of the squalid lower end of town. Any man from your own home planet brought with him something of that far-off, half-legendary ancestral place of birth. Even though you might, as Shaklane himself, have been born light years across the galaxy, there was an aura about home that ultra-light ships only heightened and sub-radio only made the more intense. Fa’rudin. Fa’rudin the Golden. One day, when his governorship of

this piddling little lump of clay was over . . .

Now, he gestured to Chesquin and his aide escorted the Terran spy out to receive his money. Shaklane digested this information. This planet, for all his contemptuous comparison with Fa'rudin—which he had never seen—was a pleasant place and a foothold onto the further stars that the government would not wish to lose—especially to an undisciplined horde of barbarians from a planet like Earth. He laughed a little shame-facedly at the conception. And that, of course, brought up the nagging anxiety that had been at the back of his mind all morning. Hal-loran's interview had merely served to thrust it behind the immediate press of current events; now he brought it out and savoured it sourly.

The Earth people might be excited about a man from home; he also was expecting a visitor from home. Only, his visitor was a blatant check-up on his handling of affairs on Sanda'ule, a reminder that the home government had an ever-open eye on their frontiers.

Chesquin came back, smiling complacently.

"He psyched beautifully,"

he said silkily, placing the film on Shaklane's desk. "Shall I run it for you now, Your Excellency?"

"Do that," Shaklane said absently. He was trying to convince himself that the man from Fa'rudin would agree that these underhand methods of government were permissible to a Fa'rudin noble. Administering justice to a mixture of galactic cultures called for unquestioning readiness to adopt other mores and techniques—if the official from home was a stiff-necked bureaucrat, life would not be happy for Shaklane.

"All ready," Chesquin said, and set the projector rolling.

The screen settled down to a whorling pattern of lines and curves that Shaklane concentrated on, brushing aside his doubts of his own actions. The Terran spy had, indeed, psyched beautifully. His mental attitude showed strongly through the raffle of thought superimposed on the screen.

"At least," Chesquin offered, "he spoke the truth. There is a man coming from Terra."

The curlicues on the screen fluctuated and then steadied.

"That was when I gave him the money." Chesquin sounded cynical.

Shaklane grunted. He watched the screen.

"There it is," he said, his tone disgruntled, as though denied a favourite fruit for no good reason. "That rippling bar all along the lower edge of the frame. A typical lower-life form thought activity, characteristic of a dog or wild animal."

"I still think it is simply a further proof of Terrestrials' essential similarity with animals." Chesquin switched off the projector as the last frame slid through. "Thalamic sub-level thought processes——"

"And why?" Shaklane's voice was dry. "We, too, have a thalamus, Chesquin. But our psych records show no such bar of activity on that level."

"With Your Excellency's permission? My theory is that Terrans have not yet thrown off the yoke of their animal ancestry. That strong thalamic activity line proves it. We have attained thought levels denied to them, therefore we show no thalamic spectrum."

"A pretty theory." Shaklane could envy Chesquin, if he did not think very deeply. The youngster had that cocky sureness of himself which caused a maturer

intellect both jealousy and amusement. "Only, Chesquin, we haven't proved that that spectrum line is from the thalamus."

A lump knotted itself along Chesquin's jaw and he pushed at his uniform lapel with his right upper hand. Before he could say whatever was brewing behind his young, unlined face, the intercom chimed. Thankfully, Shaklane said: "Yes? What is it?"

"Inspector Ruhqua sends his compliments, Your Excellency, and he will make planetfall in one hour."

Shaklane acknowledged, and turned a face he tried to keep unworried to Chesquin. His aide was standing very stiffly. Shaklane said: "All right. Is everything ready for the inspector?"

"Everything, Your Excellency."

"Good." During the hour of waiting he found himself going over and over the preparations he had made. If this confounded inspector ever hoped to see Sanda'ule as the planet really was, he was to be disappointed. Shaklane could not visualise the government taking kindly to paid spies, even with the results to show that Shaklane had prepared. A Fa'rudin noble had no point

of contact with alien cultures. Chesquin had said that, Shaklane recalled, in somewhat different form. He buckled his sonic pistol to his belt, picked up his cloak and went out.

It was very warm. Down at the lower end of the spaceport a ruck of Terrans milled. Shaklane's driver eased his car in under the canopy and they sat there, waiting for the passengers of the ship to be ferried across the two-mile stretch of baking field.

Inspector Ruhqua was small and energetic. Shaklane experienced, and held in check, the natural repugnance to a Fa'rudin when he saw the inspector's deformity. The man had lost his lower left arm from the elbow. He climbed in and the car screeched away, a dust trail falling across the Terrestrials.

They'd been welcoming their visitor. Shaklane caught a glimpse of a tired-looking runabout parked beside the third-class exit. Ruhqua glanced at the Terrans. His face went hard.

"Space vermin," he said. "Breeding like lice and carrying their foulness from star to star."

"They keep quiet here," Shaklane said indifferently.

"I'll see they do."

The car bounced across concrete and then swung right-handed up the gubernatorial drive. Chesquin was waiting, and as soon as he had been introduced to Ruhqua, said: "A message from Halloran, Your Excellency."

Before Shaklane could reply, Ruhqua said: "Halloran! That's an Earth name." His eyes were cold.

"Yes, Inspector." Shaklane was taking off his cloak. "The leader—mayor—of the Terrans' section. Well, Chesquin, what is it?"

"Request for permission to hold a meeting in Trafalgar Square, Your Excellency."

"Permission granted," Shaklane said at once. "See that there are sufficient police on duty." He was still finishing that as Ruhqua's harsh tones cut across his voice.

"What is the meeting about? Why is it necessary to have extra police?"

Shaklane turned politely to Ruhqua. His brain was detached, aloof, sensing the care he would need to handle this man.

"The Terrans also had a man from their home today, Inspector. No extra police. Just a usual precaution."

"I see." The inspector was having difficulty in removing

his cloak and Chesquin stepped across to aid him. Shaklane was only faintly surprised by the man's reaction.

"Get away! I am perfectly capable of taking off my cloak by myself! I have left the governess stage!"

"Yes, sir. Certainly, sir." Chesquin stepped back, his high-ridged face expressionless.

Shaklane said: "I suggest coffee before dinner, Inspector. I have an admirable brand——"

As an attempt at changing the conversation, it was a lamentable failure. Ruhqua's face expressed shock, disbelief, and then consuming disgust.

"Coffee, Shaklane?" Ruhqua made the word an obscene thing. "Just how far down in the scale have you sunk, here? Are you all so degraded, then?"

"I happen to like coffee. So do very many other citizens of the Empire."

"Very well. Drink coffee. I will have Fa'rudin wine. And, Shaklane, I wish to attend this meeting."

"That can be arranged, Inspector. We can run down in the car and have a good view from the hotel."

"I wish to go incognito. This square—Trafalgar, you said? Barbaric names, barbaric people. I wish to see the scum swimming in their own back yard."

Shaklane felt the tide of events washing over him. This blundering fool would undo what he had been striving for. The Terrans were like a hydrogen bomb, waiting for the spark. Ruhqua was set on detonating the atom bomb that would trigger the larger flare, getting ready to hurl this planet out of the Empire, straight into the waiting arms of the Earthmen.

He said: "I feel that that would not be a wise move, Inspector. The Terrans are inordinately proud. If they choose to think we are violating their privileges——"

"They have no privileges. We shall attend that meeting, Shaklane. Now, I shall try your wine."

With their cloaks clasped round them they looked as Terrestrial as any of the milling throng around them. Shaklane kept his right upper on the butt of his sonic pistol; he could feel the menace in the heavy dusk air. He tried to watch the upper windows of the hotel, the last outpost of the Fa'rudin

section, but the tall steel column in the centre of the square obstructed his view. He edged casually sideways, forcing Ruhqua to follow.

In an upper window Chesquin and a body of police were watching the throng beneath. Shaklane found something significant in the realisation that they would not be able to tell him from any Earthman down here.

"They stink," Ruhqua was saying. "They really do stink."

"Talk English—and don't say things like that." Shaklane was annoyed. The man was set on getting himself killed. "Look, there's Halloran. The other must be the man from Earth." He smiled. "At least we'll hear what he has to say at first hand."

The mob quieted down, the amber rays of the sinking sun picking out their faces like a bed of gold-lilies. It was still very warm. From the space-helmeted figure standing alone at the top of the column a single splinter of light dazzled. What forgotten hero had been immortalised in stone up there? Shaklane concentrated on the speaker. Halloran had seated himself at the column's base and now a new, powerful, compelling

voice, a voice that had an undercurrent of cathedral bells, filled the square and stilled every other noise.

"Friends—people of Earth—I have come from home to greet you in your city of New Eden."

Shaklane grunted with a resigned amusement. One day the Terrestrials might call this planet by its correct name. He was aware of Ruhqua as a dark shadow by his shoulder, and turned his attention back to the speaker.

"The day is not far off when your full rights shall be met, and more than met. But that time is not yet ripe. I say to you, speaking as a duly-appointed Terran ambassador denied the privileges of that rank on this planet, that you must conform to Fa'rudin rule for a while——"

The rest was lost in a growling surge of voices that beat sluggishly up from the crowd. They were in no temper to be told to stay on the lead, Shaklane saw, and compressed his lips at the implications that one day they would slip the leash. He didn't like it. He turned for Ruhqua, determined to force the man to back out of the mob.

Ruhqua was gone.

For a moment, Shaklane could not think. Then his common sense reasserted itself and he began to peer cautiously among the pressing bodies, expecting to find Ruhqua had been shoved away in the crowd. His tension and feeling of unease skyrocketed with each passing second. There was no sign of Ruhqua. Had the fool gone off on a sight-seeing tour? At this time? On his own? Shaklane cursed all Ruhqua's stiff-necked pride and began to thrust his way out of the crowd.

He struggled free of the last swirling figures on the edge of the mob and twisted his microphone onto full power.

"Chesquin," he called out, and immediately his aide's voice came over the bone-conduction phones.

"Ruhqua is missing. Any sign of him from your window?" He knew that was hopeless before he asked.

"None, Your Excellency. Orders?"

Shaklane shifted the set around under his cloak and considered. He bit back the desire to snarl a biting question as to what Chesquin thought he could do from the

hotel windows. He felt lost. What could he do?

Short of ordering the police to move in. And he felt a strong reluctance to do that. Even for the sake of Ruhqua's neck. Perhaps, because of it.

Chesquin said: "There's some sort of disturbance over on the opposite side of the square." A gasp. "The devils! They've got a Fa'rudin down there! Oh, no——"

In a frenzy of frustration, Shaklane raced round the outskirts of the crowd, keeping clear of the shouting people, trying to find a vantage point. He clambered onto a door step and peered over bobbing heads, shadowed and lighted by street lamps that flickered into wan illumination with the sinking of the sun.

The crowd surged. People screamed. There came the coughing racket of a sonic gun.

"What's happening, Chesquin?" Shaklane had to force himself to form the words for his throat microphone; he wanted to scream the question aloud.

"They're tearing him apart, Your Excell——oh, sacred ancestors——let us get down there!"

Shaklane saw over the heads of the crowd a black object go spinning upwards, like a flying stick chopped in expertly. It was followed by another. By two more.

He heard shouts, picked out the word he dreaded to hear.

"Insect!"

He didn't have to be told what the Terrans were doing to the Fa'rudin they had caught. He knew the word "insect," knew its implications to the Terran mind.

He felt violently ill. He clung to the doorpost and shut his eyes, swaying there at the top of the steps.

Presently, Chesquin said in a choked voice: "It's all over. I don't know who it was; but he's ripped apart." Then, shocking Shaklane, bringing him to quivering awareness: "Why didn't you let the police get down there? What are you, a Terran lover? We could have killed them, cut a way through——"

"Silence, Chesquin!" Shaklane did shout this time. He didn't care. "Put yourself under arrest! How dare you address a noble like that? Get back to the House at once and ponder your offence!"

"Very good, Your Excellency." Chesquin's voice betrayed nothing. Before he

could speak again, if he had wanted to, Shaklane switched off and jumped down from the steps.

Two messages awaited him when he got back to Government House. At the first he let out a long, quivering sigh, fumbled for a chair, sat down heavily. He must be getting old. The message said, simply, in a routine report, that a policeman had been killed by the mob. Orders were requested.

The other message made him stand up and stride through to his bedroom. So Halloran wanted to see him? To grovel, to whine, to beg forgiveness for his kinsmen's atrocity? Shaklane began to dissect Halloran in his mind, very grimly, as he tidied himself up and washed away the dust from his body.

Halloran came in with a quiet composure on his face that was more than disconcerting to Shaklane. He sat behind his desk and waited whilst the Terran came to stand before him, fully conscious of his own play-acting. Halloran did not smile.

"Well, Halloran?" Shaklane dismissed his annoyance at being the first to speak. "No doubt you wish to

apologise, to beg my forgiveness for the murder?"

"Something like that," Halloran said casually.

Shaklane sat up. His eyes narrowed. He pressed his intercom switch and said, in Higher Fa'rudin: "Any news yet on Ruhqua?"

"None, Your Excellency. Police are combing every square inch of the Terran sector."

"Keep them at it. I want Ruhqua found. Alive!"

He flicked the switch up and leaned back in his chair, one hand to his chin, the others flat on the desk.

"Your attitude is strangely unsuitable under the circumstances, Halloran."

"What did you expect, Shaklane? A grovelling alien, whimpering for mercy?"

This was fantastic! A Terran daring to address the planetary governor by his name? And Halloran's attitude could almost be construed as that of the inquisitor, instead of the supplicant. He would have to be put down, firmly.

"I want the men who murdered that policeman, Halloran. I want them alive. Then I shall pass judgment. And I do not want any further trouble from you aliens." He twisted in his seat, reached

down and brought out the coffee tray. Deliberately, insultingly, he drank without offering a cup to Halloran. "I also want the Fa'rudin your people kidnapped. I want him alive, unharmed. Otherwise, I shall instruct my government to issue the necessary orders to evacuate your people from Sanda'ule—after the necessary retribution has been levied. Is that plain?"

Halloran grinned. "Perfectly plain. Unfortunately, I can't go along with you on the finer details of your scheme. I must apologise sincerely for the death of your policeman." Halloran's jaws moved jerkily. "I suppose you have not been informed of why he died? No, I thought not. He was sonic-beaming on low power. Torturing a group of Earth girls. The mob didn't like that—he was foolish—a stupid, power-drunk alien insect!"

Shaklane leaped from his chair. "Halloran!" he gasped, beside himself with anger. "I'll have you broken for that!" He slammed a hand against the buzzer. "Chesquin! Chesquin! Why doesn't the man come?"

Halloran laughed openly. "Have you forgotten so soon, Shaklane? You ordered him to put himself under arrest."

Of course he had! And forgotten it! Shaklane shouted into the intercom for Chesquin to come on the double, sending the operator scuttling to obey.

"I'll see you off the planet, Halloran. I've played along with you, as you put it, tried to understand Terran psychology, countenanced your riots and insults. I've even had a sneaking regard for you. But this is it! You can't get away with this sort of thing . . ." Shaklane's voice trailed off and he sat, awkwardly, staring at Halloran.

"Halloran," he said, through suddenly puffy lips: "*How did you know Chesquin was under arrest?*"

Halloran's quiet, confident laugh infuriated him. He leaned across the desk, supporting himself on his two lower arms, and struck the Terran hard across the face.

"Answer me!"

"I'm surprised, Shaklane, genuinely surprised." Halloran wiped a fleck of blood from the corner of his mouth and stared levelly at Shaklane. "I liked you, alien though you might be. I thought that if I tried to play ball with you on this planet of New Eden, tried to keep the Earth folk in their quarter and under your law,

we'd get along. But it seems I was mistaken."

There was a roaring in Shaklane's ears. This was a nightmare. He had the impression that events were sliding away from him, racing down a long black stream into unimaginable chaos. Halloran prepared to work with him?

"What do you mean?" he croaked at last.

"Earth people are proud, Shaklane. You've said that. We aren't ready, yet, to take over this planet. But even though the Navy isn't ready, the ordinary folk are. We do things differently from the Fa'rudin. We send out the traders, then the missionaries, and the soldier follows on last. Sometimes, John Company maintains a private army. But not on New Eden. We are peaceable folk. Here we tried to fit in with the Fa'rudin, since you colonised the planet first. We didn't particularly want our own Navy and government nosing around. We were happy to live as you'd let us, even if we were confined in a ghetto. At least, we had homes."

Shaklane was breathing hard. He said: "Go on." He didn't believe this was really happening.

"We have our own hot-heads—the Freedom Party. They wanted to blast you off the planet and set it up as wholly Terran. But that wouldn't have been fair to you. By the way, Bill Smith—you call him Operative One Four—has given me very good reports on you. As I said," Halloran smiled faintly. "I liked you."

So the Terran spy was a double agent? Shaklane felt a bitter feeling swell in his mind.

Halloran went on: "Our man from Earth was here with instructions from our government. They are considering taking over this planet, in the normal order of things. The time will come, shortly, when they decide to act. Meanwhile, we can carry on as normally. Don't forget, Shaklane, the Terrans here are traders, businessmen, not people who make fighting their career. That will come later——"

"But this is a Fa'rudin planet!" Shaklane said, noises ringing in his head. He had slopped coffee all down his tunic.

Halloran smiled again, sympathetically.

"I realise it must be difficult for you to accept this. How-

ever"—iron crept into his voice—"Earth is expanding. We are merely the froth that comes before the great flood. You will be wise to co-operate with us, treat us as equals and friends. Against the day of wrath."

"I—I—this is madness—I'll have you bundled off the planet. Chesquin! Where the——"

Chesquin came in. The pallor and terror on his face startled Shaklane.

Chesquin said: "I have a message from the Earth man calling himself an ambassador, Your Excellency. He asks me to tell you that the Terrans are holding Ruhqua as hostage against their mayor."

Halloran clucked. "Rather blunt; but the essence of it is there."

Shaklane said: "You've just said, Halloran, that you are not fighters. What is to prevent me from pitchforking you all off Sanda'ule now?" He was regaining his calm, breathing strength and composure into himself. These aliens could be broken—and he'd break them! "Your threat against Ruhqua could not move me."

"I know that." Halloran spoke reflectively. "I know what sort of thing Ruhqua is.

Compared to him, you're a bright shining friend to Terrans. However, he doesn't count. What does count is the Terran battlefleet that is manœuvring somewhere off the other side of Capella. That, and other things you don't yet comprehend."

"Fa'rudin and Earth are not at war!"

"Of course not. What two great powers go to war, except as a last resort, over trifling frontier planets? Bring some sense into the argument, Shaklane. And, anyway, if there was a war, I'm afraid your people would stand very little chance against Earth—uh- huh, Chesquin. I wouldn't if I were you!"

Chesquin's mouth gaped foolishly. He stared at Halloran, and said, helplessly: "I was going to sonic-beam him there and then——"

"Listen, you blockheads." Halloran's voice rang loudly, paining Shaklane's mind, rasping at the headache that was tearing into the soft nerve cells. "Earth and Fa'rudin can get along, as we have been, if you keep your trigger-happy hotheads under the same sort of control that we maintain in our ghetto. We want to keep the status-quo. At least, until the Navy and

the government decide it's time they had their cut. You don't have to do a damn thing, not a solitary, single thing, to have affairs back on the happy plane they were before your pal, Ruhqua, arrived."

Shaklane groped for sanity against the pain that flooded down into his mind. It was hard to think. It was as though someone had opened the top of his head with a scalpel and was cheerfully rubbing a piece of sandpaper against his naked, pulsating brain. He rubbed his temples with his fingers. Halloran was far too confident. There must be some way to break his composure.

"What do we do if——" he began.

"It's no good arguing, Shaklane. I'm afraid you'll just have to go along with us under duress, if under no other way. We don't want to start fighting."

"You claim Earth could beat Fa'rudin. I don't believe that." Shaklane said it flatly, defiantly.

Halloran sighed and rubbed his jaw. He appeared to be considering. Then, as though he had reached a decision, he said: "You were wondering about the low-level activity on

that psych gadget of yours. Chesquin suggested it was our tail-wagging ancestors coming out in us."

"How did you know about that——?" Shaklane began.

Halloran waved him to silence. He said: "You don't know what that activity line means. You don't know how I knew about Chesquin being put under arrest—you don't know a whole lot of things that a governor is expected to know about his subjects, do you?"

Shaklane realised that Halloran's voice was almost, but not quite, taunting.

A terrible suspicion flamed in him.

"Bad headache, Shaklane?" Halloran said, a genuine look of commiseration on his

features. "There, that better?"

Like a drive taking a ship into hyper-space, the nagging pain in Shaklane's head vanished. He sat down, quite composedly, quite in command of himself. He knew, beyond any shadow of a doubt, that he was beaten. And more than him personally—the whole of Fa'rudin might. They would, as Halloran had said, stand no chance against Earth.

There was only one thing he could do.

He lifted the coffee tray. "Until your Navy gets here, Halloran . . ."

"That won't be for some time." Halloran smiled and reached for the coffee cup. "Until then, we're friends. Your health, Your Excellency."

OLYMPICON

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Sometimes the cruellest way to
punish a man is to give him
what he wants.
Exactly what he wants.

LOGICAL ELIMINATION

by WILLIAM E. BENTLEY

Morgan was going to kill Logan.

If he had been asked his reason he would have said it was because Logan sniffed; but there was also their freighter, *Blue-Bell*, complete ownership of which fell to him when his partner died.

The manner of Logan's dying had become an intellectual exercise with him. The imagining of the actual deed—a glorious intoxication. He saw himself dealing vicious, powerful blows, while Logan went down in blood before him. Then his breathing would become shallow and quick,

and his brain grow dizzy with delight.

He lay now on an acceleration couch and stared up at the ceiling. Logan was at the navigator's desk, absorbed in some calculation and droning a tuneless melody. He sniffed. Morgan turned lazily over on to his stomach and smiled insanely at him. God, that sniff! Every twenty seconds, regular as clockwork. *I'm going to kill you, Logan. Sniff away, damn you. It won't be long now.*

Another sniff punctuated Logan's humming. Morgan reached down and gripped

the couch stanchion. He grinned as he felt his muscles bunch big and hard.

"Make planetfall in about four hours," announced Logan suddenly.

"Shall we?" asked Morgan gently.

Logan turned to look at him. "I don't know what's the matter with you," he complained petulantly. "You don't seem to take an interest in anything nowadays. And you're always grinning at something. What's so funny? And what are we going to this stinking planet for? What is this job? Though I don't suppose you can tell me. I'm only your partner . . ." His high-pitched whine droned on and on. Morgan closed his eyes.

The planet hadn't even got a name. On the charts it was number A.S.53U. U for unknown, unexplored, uninhabitable.

Morgan brought the ship down as if he was handling a crate of eggs. Somewhere deep inside, isolated from the rest of him, was an area of violent, shouting fury, but his face was smilingly placid, his movements gentle and unhurried. He put on his suit and waited patiently while Logan

shrugged and struggled his way into his. Finally, Logan straightened up, switched on his radio. "Are you ready?" he asked.

"I've been ready for a long time," replied Morgan softly.

Logan snorted at what he thought was criticism. He opened the door and threw the rope ladder down, turned round and began to climb down it. Morgan watched him until his head was just below the edge of the door frame, then he said "Logan."

Logan raised himself up. "What do you want now?"

His head was poised just above the door frame, and Morgan drew back his right foot and kicked him. Logan's back arched, his fingers gave up their grip on the door frame and he fell. It was eighty-five feet to the ground.

Morgan stood in the doorway for a long time. Breathing slowly, feeling warm and relaxed. Just standing there was enough for a long, long time. Then he took a spade and went to bury Logan. He buried him in his suit, and some distance from the ship. For, of course, there would be an investigation, and evidence of murder had to remain.

He took off, plunging along a rainbow trajectory that had one foot in Logan's grave and the other in Earth Central, and half a million miles from Earth a police patrol rocket intercepted him. The sight of the stubby, powerful little rocket gave him his first thrill of fear.

He opened the televiewer ship to ship channel, and a heavy face under a peaked cap appeared in the screen.

"Identify yourself, name your business, describe your trajectory." The officer spoke the formula with a trace of boredom in his voice.

Routine, thought Morgan. He's done it ten times today already. Check, file and index. Well, here's Morgan. Under M for murderer.

He moistened his lips and spoke carefully into the screen. "Freighter *Blue-Bell*," he said. "My name is Morgan, and I've killed my partner."

The face in the screen became suddenly mask-like. The eyes narrowed, the slack muscles tightened.

"I want to tell you how it was," said Morgan eagerly, leaning towards the screen. "He was there all the time, you see——"

"Don't talk to me," snapped

the other. "Don't say anything, yet. I'm going to drop behind you now. You will make planetfall at Earth Central, and stay in your ship until you're told what to do. Have you got that?"

Morgan nodded. The screen went blank, and he leaned forward to switch it off. He saw that his hand was shaking, and he grinned mirthlessly. Relax, he told himself. Remember the big plan. They don't hang people for murder nowadays. Murder is always due to a mental aberration, and they'll analyse you and cure you, and let you go.

He landed at Earth Central, and police officers escorted him to a small room on the ground floor of the Health Administration Centre. There, a polite young man behind a desk looked at him over pince-nez and asked him questions.

"Your name is Morgan?"

"That's right."

"What certificates do you hold?"

For almost an hour the questions went on. The same sort of questions that a man is asked when he buys insurance, or pays income tax, or applies for a job. Morgan

replied with half his mind at first, but later found himself having to think, to remember half-forgotten details of names, dates and places.

Towards the end a big, handsome man came into the room by a side door. He took up the paper the young man was writing on, and compared it silently with one he was holding. He shot a swift glance at Morgan, put the paper down, left the room.

As the door closed behind him, the young man asked pleasantly: "And why did you kill your partner?"

This was it. Now for the big speech. Morgan leaned forward, looked into the empty, expressionless eyes in that coldly polite face. He saw the pen held above the paper, ready to write his answer below that list of dates, names, facts and figures, and he realised suddenly that he had nothing to say.

"I don't know," he mumbled.

"Don't know," said the young man, writing it down.

Morgan cursed himself for a fool then, for not realising that this was something more than a routine interview. It had been planned with care, and the implications of that

were tremendous. If he was too stupid to realise that it had been planned, then it didn't matter. If he was intelligent enough to realise it, then they had shown him quite clearly that their intelligence and technique in this matter were greater than his. It was a warning that, if he was fighting, then he was an amateur fighting blindfolded against professionals.

He thought frantically. Trying to remember what he'd said, or even a reaction to a question, which might be all they needed to hang him. He caught himself up there. No, they wouldn't hang him. They'd cure him.

"Will you go into the other room, Mr. Morgan," asked the polite young man. "They're waiting for you."

"They," thought Morgan savagely. Always this mysterious, omnipotent, omniscient "They."

He got up, went through the side door into the next room.

Armchairs, deep and comfortable. One or two small tables, and bookshelves up to the ceiling. A pipe-smoking man in a white coat stood in front of the window. He smiled as Morgan entered.

"Ah, Mr. Morgan. Come

in please. Won't you sit down?"

Morgan lowered himself carefully into a chair.

"I am Dr. Janus," the other went on. "I have been appointed your judge, and this is my assistant, Thomas."

The big man sat in a corner reading a book. He did not look up as he was introduced.

"You have a legal right to object to the appointment of both or either of us. Do you wish to do so?"

Morgan shook his head.

"Very well, then. Now, at this stage we like to explain a few things. Correct a few wrong impressions, and generally put you in the big picture. You understand?"

Morgan nodded.

"Now these are the offices of the Administrator of Personal Justice. Where the police department tries to find out how, we try to find the answer to the vastly more important question—why. Of course, you bypassed the police department, and we shall have to take that into consideration, too.

"I said just now that I was your judge. That merely means that I am in charge of your case. I don't pass judgment on you, or anything like

that. I just want to know the truth. It's been known since the nineteenth century that capital punishment doesn't have any effect on the statistics of murder, and also that some murders are justifiable when all the facts are known. And that's my job. To get all the facts. Are you ready now?"

Morgan stood up. A little spurt of fear quickened his breathing. "What for?" he asked.

"Nothing very much. We've created an artificial environment, and we want to assess your reactions to it."

He went out, and Thomas held the door open, looked inquiringly at Morgan. More politeness, only now they were allowing the iron to show through the velvet.

Morgan joined Dr. Janus in the corridor, and walked by his side, listening to his amiable chatter about this and that. Thomas brought up the rear. And in that fashion they conducted Morgan through a series of physical indignities.

He was taken to a surgery, where several young men in white uniforms contrived to give him a complete physical examination without once

really looking at him. He was stripped, weighed and photographed. They took samples of his blood and spittle. They peered into his eyes and ears, and down his throat.

"The theory that a man passes judgment on himself," observed Dr. Janus, while all this was going on, "is not a new one. It's a statement of an inversion of facts, really, because a man acts according to his nature, and a man can't get away from himself. You see, in order to preserve a sane balance any excess of inspiration or behaviour, in one direction, must be accompanied by a similar excess in the appropriate opposite direction. Do you understand what I mean? Never mind if you don't."

An intern handed him a clip board with a number of forms on it. He looked at them briefly, signed them, handed them back.

"Well, let's move on," he said briskly. "On to the operations theatre. Oh, don't be alarmed," he said, as Morgan looked sharply at him. "We're not going to cut you up."

Morgan stared at him. So many things had happened, so

smoothly, so fast, that he had no time to think of their significance, but the phrase, "an excess of inspiration," lingered on in his mind to trouble him. Then he felt a stab in his thigh, and looked down, saw an intern wipe the needle of a hypodermic syringe and put it away.

"Perhaps you'd better lie down, on that trolley," suggested Dr. Janus. "That's not an intravenous injection, but it's pretty rapid."

... an excess of behaviour ... preserve a sane balance. There was something important there. Morgan gazed stupidly at Dr. Janus and tried to make the words into a picture, but they broke apart, and flew into the approaching darkness. He was hardly aware that he was lifted, and placed on the stretcher trolley.

A white ceiling began to move along overhead ...

He woke up with the familiar contours of an acceleration couch beneath him. He turned over onto his back and opened his eyes. Time to get up, he told himself, and stretched languidly. He sat up, yawning, and checked the control panel instruments and gauge readings. Switched on the viewing screen and looked

out at the stars, and it bored him. He switched off and looked round the cabin—*his* cabin—with the habitual sense of pleasure. Coffee, he thought, and while it was boiling he dealt himself a hand of solitaire.

He had drunk the coffee and was absorbed in the card game when a voice spoke over the radio.

"Hey there! Freighter on my port bow. Let's hear from you, 'boy.'"

Morgan reluctantly put his cards down, flipped the radio switch. "Freighter *Blue-Bell*. Morgan, captain and master. What do you want?"

"Want?" The voice was puzzled. "I want company, conversation, magazines, films. Open your viewer channel, or better still, engage me in a locking orbit and we'll have a brew of coffee."

Morgan hesitated. A frown of irritation creased his forehead. The voice belonged to someone young, and he didn't want to hurt his feelings.

"Look," he said awkwardly. "I'd rather not. I've got a lot of work on here, and I haven't any time to waste. Some other time, eh?"

There was a pause before the other replied, then "Okay,

mate. If you don't want to be friendly you don't want to be friendly. What's the matter? Don't you like people?"

"I'm sorry," said Morgan, embarrassed. He switched off and grimaced. Human relations were the very devil. A man was best on his own. Make a friend or an enemy, sooner or later you'd get hurt. As soon as you started to talk to someone there was conflict. They'd got to impress themselves on you, and you had to impress yourself on them. It was a rat race. He was better out of it—and damned glad he'd never taken a partner. Alone, he was a complete man.

He picked up his cards and the incident began to fade from his mind. Then he frowned at the cards, and wondered what he'd been doing. He put them down and stared about him as his surroundings began to fade. Like the reflection in a window fades when the sun comes up, the illusion dissolved from around him, and left him aware of himself.

He was in a darkened amphitheatre. Twenty feet in front of him, and some distance above the ground, was the window front of a lighted

control room. White-coated young men moved about inside, attending to machinery, writing down dial readings, removing charts and graphs from meters. Only Thomas and Dr. Janus were actually looking at him. Dr. Janus waved to him cheerfully, like a politician acknowledging the approval of the crowd, and picked up a microphone. His distorted voice echoed about the amphitheatre.

"How do you feel, Mr. Morgan? A little bewildered, eh? Well, never mind. See if you can stand. Go on, we've disconnected you."

Morgan looked down at himself. He was wearing his own coveralls and boots, and he was sitting on an acceleration couch. He planted his feet more firmly on the floor and stood up.

"Excellent, Mr. Morgan. Now, if you'll look to your right you will see a door. Go through into the corridor, and we'll be right with you."

He felt sick and dizzy. His scalp tingled, and every nerve in his body screamed aloud at being tampered with. He went out into the corridor and walked back with Dr. Janus and Thomas to their rooms.

He slumped into one of the

deep armchairs and put his head in his hands. Dr. Janus went to a cabinet and poured whisky into a glass. "Here," he said, and gave it to him, watched him drink it.

Morgan took it in one, grimacing as the fire flooded his stomach. He passed his hand over his face, squeezing the flesh hard.

"You're so nice," he said carefully. "You're so kind and polite, and I hate your guts."

Thomas started forward, but Dr. Janus waved him down.

"Well, that's pretty normal," he said. "What we do dislike is no reaction at all." He sat down opposite Morgan and began to fill his pipe. "Well," he went on. "The analysis is complete. Don't you want to know the conclusions we've reached?"

Morgan leaned back and closed his eyes.

"You talk so much," he said. "Hang me and be damned to you."

Dr. Janus looked faintly shocked. "Please, Mr. Morgan. I've already told you. We don't hang anyone here. We just find out the truth and have the person concerned live with it, that's all. In

your case the truth is that you are a complete introvert. It wasn't Logan you hated, it was the fact that he was another human being alone with you. Someone you had to talk to, think about, when all the time you just wanted to think about yourself. No wonder he got on your nerves. You're only normal when you're by yourself."

Morgan sat up straight. "That's right. That's what I wanted to make you see. I had to kill him. I had to!"

Dr. Janus nodded. "Of course, my dear chap. Of course."

"Well, then. What now?"

"Now? Oh, nothing. There's your ship out there. Take off any time you like."

Morgan stood up, seized with a sudden, trembling eagerness.

"You mean that? I can go?"

"Haven't I just said so? And while I don't want you to think I'm pushing you, I'd be grateful if you'd go now. I have another patient to see in a few minutes."

Morgan went to the door, turned with his hand on the latch. A bullet in the back, he thought. The prisoner was

shot while trying to escape. He looked from one to the other, seeking complete assurance. Thomas had gone back to his book, and Dr. Janus was just looking at him.

"Tell me again," said Morgan. "No slow-acting poisons? No trigger-happy coppers? I can go free?"

Dr. Janus made an expansive gesture. "You're as free as a bird—no, freer. You can go as far and as fast as your ship will take you."

Morgan believed him.

He left the building and thumbed a ride on a service truck out to his ship.

"What's your ship?" asked the driver.

"*Blue-Bell*," said Morgan, watching him. The man nodded abstractedly. The name obviously meant nothing to him. "I know where it is," he said. "I'll take you there."

He pulled up under the vanes of the *Blue-Bell*, and elevated his service tower, giving Morgan a ride up to his cabin. The ladder was down and the door open, but this was compulsory practice. Every ship that touched down was inspected and overhauled. Morgan stepped inside. He

pulled the ladder up and swung the heavy door shut, and immediately felt safer. He took the inspection label off the radio switch and looked at it. Six blue-ink O.K. stamps. He switched on the radio and called ground control.

"Hello, ground control. Freighter *Blue-Bell*. Morgan, captain and master, requesting permission to take off."

Control replied, after an interval, in the official, mechanical monotone that took no account of the fact that a man was getting away with murder.

"I see you, *Blue-Bell*. Give your inspection certificate clearance number, and check with me . . ."

Just let me get off the ground, prayed Morgan. Come on, come on, come on. But now he was merely impatient, fear was on the other side of a heavy door. He almost enjoyed the slow parade of dial readings and gauge positions.

"Permission granted," said control finally. "Take off within one minute."

Morgan switched on the pumps. Pushed the fuel rods forward. He leaned back and triggered the firing lever.

From the very first, from

the instant the pressure wave gripped him, he knew that something was wrong. There was a governor to maintain a limit of thrust, and almost immediately he realised that it wasn't going to operate. Putting it out of action was a simple matter. It was only necessary to drain the mercury away from above the diaphragm, and the effect was disastrous. His speed increased, clocking hundreds and thousands as though they were seconds. Acceleration mounted. He lay, imprisoned under immense gravities, his brain writhing like a trapped animal in his skull. Like arteries, the fuel pipes remained open, bleeding the ship's life away.

Hours later the thunder died to a whisper and the whisper was lost in a chilling silence. He was able to move, to sit up, to reach for the switch on the viewing screen. He looked out into his future, and whimpered. Ahead was a darkness so vast, so empty, it seemed to draw the very soul from his body.

He had killed Logan because he had to be alone. Now he was alone.

For ever.

It is quite possible that you may meet someone . . . who has been somewhere . . . and seen something. But would you believe him?

Lunar Bridge

by A. M. St. Clair

THAT'S RIGHT," SAID THE little man, waving his now empty glass. "That's me, world's first space pilot!"

I don't know how long he had been on that track when I went into the bar, but the other three occupants had apparently had enough of it to drive them into a bored, back-turning indifference. Like myself, they were journalists—few others use the place in the afternoon—and I knew them just well enough to cause nods of recognition all round. But they were older men, combining serious business with their bitters, and their attitudes did not invite further company. So I sat on the high stool at the bar, next to the little man, and ordered a Scotch and splash.

"Eight ships," he said, nodding vehemently. "Eight ships I've taken up. Eight ships landed on the Moon. Eight ships, five of them crashed, and not one of them came back. Not a damned one!"

He must have seen my eyebrows go up. That he could have seen from the back bar of the other pub across the road, anyway. He knew that he had attention.

"All right, so you don't believe me. I don't blame you. But just listen. That's all I ask. Just listen! Somebody's got to hear about it. The damned fools! They can't keep a thing like that under cover!"

He banged his empty glass on the bar in front of me, and, surprisingly enough, it survived. It was a brandy beaker, and I reflected irrelevantly that this was one of the few pubs in London where they served brandy decently. I took the hint, and offered the glass to the barmaid. She looked doubtful.

"It's all right," said the soi-distant deep-spacer, "I'm not drunk. Two double brandies doesn't get me sozzled. I've been like this for three weeks, 'nor any drop to drink'."

I shrugged. The barmaid shrugged. She disappeared into the place at the back where they hide the bottles that they're not particularly proud of. And I took stock of my new pal. Well below average height, he wore the uniform of an officer in the Royal Canadian Air Force. And, though his face was flushed, it really did seem to be with suppressed anger rather than contained alcohol, for his eyes were hard, bright and alert. He pressed his right hand to them as I looked, fingertips to the left eye, root of the fingers to the right, index finger in the air, thumb along the right temple. I knew exactly what the gesture meant, because I do it myself. It was tiredness and frustration, not inebriation.

"Look, bud," he said, "I didn't come to this joint to get shot. I wanted to look up some of you news-hounds. Because what I've got to tell, the public ought to know. I've spent the last three weeks in a locked private ward. Nervous prostration, they called it. Nervous baloney. Sure, my nerves are a bit edged—same like any driver that's had a pile up. Landing a rocket on the Moon is really something. Crashing it

is just hell, even if you're not in it. But they don't have to lock you up. That's what it was, just a lock up. Hell knows what would have happened to me in the end, if I hadn't got out of it. I just don't know what their plans were. All I know is, they decided it had to be hushed up, and I was only a nuisance. So I scouted around until I found my kit in a locker, and I got away up a drain-pipe, and over about half the roofs in London. And, brother, you've got yourself a story. Get out that little notebook and start in scribbling. Er, Cheers!"

In spite of the looks of contemptuous pity from the three elder members, that was exactly what I did. The Canuck took a good swig and gave me a considering look.

"Nearly three years ago," he went on, "to be exact, in July of nineteen fifty-two, astronomers discovered something odd on the Moon. A bridge. A real, honest-to-goodness bridge. It was down in one corner of what they call the Mare Crisium, and it crossed a gap in a mountain range. It was discovered pretty well independently in three continents, and there wasn't

any doubt about it. It didn't appear in previous photographs of the area, and it shouldn't have been missed. Because it was twenty miles long, three miles broad and nearly a mile high. Some bridge!"

"Some bridge-builders," I put in.

He looked out of the narrow strip of clear glass at the top of the windows, looked at the crescent Moon, pale in the hazy-green London twilight sky. New Moon through glass, I caught myself thinking. After a moment, he closed his eyes, briefly.

"Yep," he said, "some bridge-builders!"

He passed his hand over his slightly unshaven chin. One day's growth, I guessed. He seemed to be wondering whether or not I was taking him seriously. That I didn't know myself.

"So?" I said. I tried to convey the right degree of interest and conviction. He went on:

"About the Kremlin, I wouldn't know. Maybe they've got their own plans. Maybe they just don't care. But I do know that Whitehall and the Pentagon got together on it P.D.Q., and they decided that they had to have a

closer look. They knew that they could put a missile on the Moon easy enough, if they were willing to spend the time and money; and they also knew that they weren't going to get a passenger job there in the next ten years. So they tried to compromise. They built a missile with automatic landing gear, and a microwave TV transmitter. Foolproof, they reckoned.

Sure, it got there. And it kept right on going. Nix. No pix. That was where I came into the picture. I was the guy that flew the Canadian version of the air-launched 1,500 m.p.h. interceptor. It wasn't like the Douglas. I didn't fly it blind. I lay on my belly, instrument panel straight ahead, observation panel right below. I'm made funny, too. I can take eight g without blacking out. Just the guy, they said." He seemed lost in recollection for a moment. He sighed. "Just the guy!"

Another couple of drinks were in order by this time, but I made them singles. Wits and money, both had to last.

"Then what?" I asked. "So you went to the Moon on your belly, and you never came back?" I could have bitten off my tongue. It had sounded smart in my head,

so I just had to say it out. Big mouth. I thought from the look he gave me that I should never hear the end of the story. I put my hand on his sleeve. "Sorry, pal. I'm one of those fellows who can never resist a crack. It comes of not thinking up very many. I didn't mean it." The look subsided. He went on.

"Cheers! Well, they built a most goshawful dohinkus. It was like a Link Trainer, only about twice the size, and on the end of a forty-foot arm. The whole thing could swing around, and up and down, and twist about in any direction. It stuck out from a control tower that was full to the eyebrows with servo-mechanisms and electronic gear. It was radio linked with a TV rocket, so that Joe Muggins, boxed up in the end of it, felt everything he would have felt if he'd been in the rocket itself. Well, not quite everything. They'd reduced all g's in proportion, so that I never got more than about eight, and never more than five at critical moments. They said!"

"Wait a moment," I interrupted. "Let's get this clear. What was actually going to the Moon was a radio controlled rocket; you were to control

it from a mock-up on the end of a moving arm, and all the forces acting on the rocket itself were to be transmitted back to your driving-seat, to give you enough 'feel' so that you could make a good job of guiding and landing. Is that right?"

"That was the theory, laddie. When I linked up with the project they had eight rockets ready. It had taken them two years, and the rockets alone cost about a hundred and eighty thousand each, less radio gear. They never did tell me how much the radio gear cost." He finished off his drink in one gulp, the way I've always understood you don't do to brandy. It didn't seem to worry him. It was lousy brandy, anyway.

"The first two were just three hundred-sixty thousand worth of junk-heap on the floor of Mare Crisium, when I'd finished with them. Pounds, not dollars, did I remember to say? And, believe me, brother, the only difference between being in the rocket when it crashes, and being in this damned dohinkus, so far as I can see, is that if you get out, my way, you've got air to breathe! You feel every twist, every turn, you see it coming up at you—

two thousand line stereo TV doesn't leave much to the imagination—and you know that you're out of control. You're a flier; it's no use telling yourself that you're just lying in a box in Cornwall, your bones won't let you. They know what it means. I tell you, the first twice they dragged me out of that thing, I thought they'd pulled a fast one on me. I thought I was on the Moon. Not once, mind you, but twice! That may give you some idea of what it feels like!"

If I had needed any other demonstration of what it felt like, I had only to look at him. Even now, he was re-living the experience. There was real sweat on his forehead, real fear in his eyes. It was another drink and a couple of minutes later before he could go on. He was a good deal quieter, and very serious, when he continued.

"The aiming was pretty good. I had a look at this bridge both times. Only for a couple of split seconds. I had more to bother about. But there wasn't any doubt about it, it was a bridge all right. Of course, the big shots had known that all the time. But they hadn't seen it real

close. At the start I had half thought it might be a false alarm, some natural rock-formation or something. But it isn't. It's as fine a bridge as you could ever hope to see, a nice smooth taper to the centre, a gentle slope up from the sides—a real engineering job. And, so help me, what a place for a bridge! A mile up in the air, joining two almost vertical escarpments, a mile up! It doesn't cross over anything; there's no water on the Moon, there's no bad territory beneath it, as territory goes in those parts. Who wants a bridge up there?"

He shook his head and maltreated some more brandy. It didn't seem to be having much effect on him, however, and I could well believe his earlier statement that it took more than two brandies to get him sozzled—"shot" I suppose he would have called it.

"I got number three down safely. It had only one bridge-head in the field of view, but that was pretty interesting. The cliffs at the point where it started were about four miles high, and this structure came jutting out about a quarter of the way up. Where it joined the cliff face, there

was a semi-circular opening, sort of a tunnel mouth, something like two miles in diameter. I could judge the sizes because I'd been told that the thing was roughly a mile high in the middle. Anyway, I could see that it was all a mighty big engineering job, and no accident at all. I didn't have long to look at it—I was just Joe Muggins, the driver, and as soon as they could get me out of it, I'd had it. I wasn't invited. Not until they wanted somebody to put down numbers four through eight! Well, number five and number eight were on target. The rest were just incidental expenses. It was number eight that was really the baby! And boy, if it was tough landing those crashers, the toughest part of all was *after* we'd got number eight safely there! I know they saw it, too, watching on the monitors outside the dohinkus, because they just stopped talking on the intercom the moment it appeared. And they left me in there, looking at it, for fifteen minutes, instead of the usual bum's rush! Afterwards, they said it was nothing, subjective time, just overstrain, take a rest old boy, and they whistled me up to this so-called sana-

torium in London. But they locked the door, brother, they locked the door!"

It took another refreshment before he was able to continue, and I mentally noted that if this one didn't see us through I should have to make an appointment to see him on pay day.

"We'd got a lovely view," he went on. "We'd landed number eight right on top of the farther cliff, facing down into the tunnel. Then we saw it. It was big, and white, and shapeless, above a mile across, and it came rolling out of the tunnel. As soon as you saw it, you knew that it was alive. You couldn't say that it looked at you, it didn't have anything to look with; it just kinda riveted you with some sort of power of attention. You knew right away that it wasn't any use asking yourself why it wanted a bridge twenty miles long and a mile high and two miles wide, because even if it told you, you still wouldn't understand. It was absolutely and totally alien, and it was very, very unfriendly. That you knew, and how! It just considered us through those TV's for fifteen solid, nerve-twisting minutes. And then—phooey! Everything went!

Outside, I guess they saw the explosions, and heard them. Me, for a split second, I was servo-linked to them. And they were something, even half-scale, for a couple of milliseconds! That Thing sure didn't like being spied on! Believe me, brother"—and here his sincerity and earnestness were quite beyond doubting—"Believe me, brother, that Thing doesn't like us. Not one little bit. Unless you've seen it, you just don't know how much it doesn't like us!"

One of the elder members had been making a couple of 'phone calls. He spoke briefly to his cronies, nodding significantly in our direction. They came towards us in a group, mouths tight. The little fellow made a move towards the door. They intercepted him, shepherded him back to his seat at the bar.

"Come along, fellow," said one of them—he was the music critic on one of the big dailies—"come and have a nice little drink. We've 'phoned for your friends, and they'll be along for you any minute now. They are very keen to meet you again, and they were most particular that we shouldn't let you go before they arrived."

He spoke as to a lost child, though I imagine that he was giving his interpretation of a man humouring a lunatic. The Canadian winced at the word "fellow"—the way it was said, it might as well have been "sonny"—and then he smiled wryly.

"O.K.," he said. "If two governments are going to say I'm nuts, I guess I'm nuts." He looked at me, for all the liquor, levelly enough.

"Laddie, get out of here with that notebook, before they arrive. You'll never get it away, else. And one more thing. Number seven went way out of control. It landed fourteen hundred miles away from the bridgehead, and it got smashed up a good bit. But the TV is still working. It didn't blow up when the others did—the Thing must have overlooked it. Get yourself a three-centimetre hook-up and beam it on the Moon, and you'll get your proof. I'm depending on you to get this thing into the open. Now, git!"

I got.

I heard the rest of the episode from an *Echo* reporter who happened to walk into the bar as I was leaving. Two well-dressed gentlemen

strolled in, went straight over to the little fellow and took charge. No fuss, all very quiet. They must have sized up the three elder members pretty quickly. They merely passed some light remarks on the lines of "Been bothering people with his tales again, has he?" and left it at that.

They didn't think to ask about anyone else who might have been there, and Johnny Canuck didn't tell them. Careless, of course, but natural enough when their main consideration was avoidance of publicity. So he went quietly.

Now, I haven't the slightest idea how to go about building a three-centimetre stereo TV; but I have a pal on a technical paper, so I put it up to him. It appears that, even if you did know all the technical details, it would still leave one thing wanting—a whale of a lot of money! However, he does have a "shack," as he calls it, and a lot of centiwave stuff; so one evening a couple of months ago we had a go on the three-centimetre band, with a parabolic antenna beamed on the Moon (the jargon is his—I'd translate, only I don't know how.) And we did get a lot of noise, with a fantastically wide bandwidth, which he says, from

the sound of it, is pretty certain to be video.

Well, that was good enough for me. I wrote it all up in my best sensation style, and my boss was almost as excited about it as I was. But, like most Editors, particularly hard-headed Scottish ones, Jock Smillie was a very cautious man. After he had done his best to cover up his first show of excitement, he hummed and hawed a bit, and said he'd let me know in an hour or two. As soon as I was out of the office, he started telephoning. I know what numbers he called, too, because I'm pretty friendly with the girl on the board. I leave you to guess. Anyway, the outcome was that he had me back in his office in fifty minutes flat, and my story hadn't made it. No reasons given.

So here's the idea. I don't want to let the little guy down, and in any case, I quite agree with him that it's wrong to keep this thing secret. Some of you will be radio fans, with enough stuff and knowledge to go to work on it. Three point one six centimetres, and I hope you tune in before the batteries run down or the Thing finds it!

An interesting article on a
subject which concerns us all.

For **YOU**—at 65!

by **H. J. CAMPBELL, B.Sc.**

THOSE OF US WHO ARE lucky enough to keep out of the way of 'buses, diseases and other agents of sudden death, will one day be old. It is not easy for us, now, to understand quite what that means. When we are young someone employs us, someone loves us, someone depends upon us for something, and we are very much concerned with our own lives. But when old age gets into our bones and pulls our faces into wrinkles, much, if not all, of this ceases. Employers send us away. The love that once was ours—from offspring, perhaps, or a spouse—has become more a kindly pity. No one depends on us for

anything. And for the first time in our lives we become truly aware of the other people in the world around us. Because we are at their mercy.

We can no longer call upon the buoyancy of youth to carry us over the troubles of life—to change our job, seek a new spouse, spank the children, go to the pictures and forget. Old people can't forget. They have nothing else to remember. Nothing else to think about. Oh, now and then, perhaps, when things are not going too badly, they spend a pleasant while in reverie. But most of the time they live in the present. And the present can hurt so very much.

At least, that is the way it is with thousands of old people today, and the way it has been with them in the past. The future is another thing.

No one reading this magazine needs to be told that the world is in a very sorry state, and that a multitude of highly fundamental problems *must* be solved if humanity is to endure. No one needs to be told that these big problems seem to be stumping the men whose job it is to solve them. It may appear odd, then, that a good many brilliant minds and skilful fingers are concentrating their energies on solving the problems of old age. Such problems loom small in contrast to the others. Yet, who knows, perhaps it is in work like this that the greatness of man becomes apparent. In refusing to ignore the difficulties of people who have come to the end of their technologically useful lives, we may well be producing the best evidence that there is a difference between us and animals.

At any rate, we have a new science, gerontology, that moves hand in hand with a

new therapy, geriatrics, and counts among its number some of the acutest medical and scientific brains the world possesses. These people have seen thousands of old people as patients and friends. They can see into the wretched lives of the aged today. And they are pledged to do something about it, and to do it fast. As this article goes to press, one of the most learned of scientific institutions, the Ciba Foundation, is arranging a meeting of these minds so that ideas can be pooled and plans knocked into shape. Very soon soon enough for you and me, maybe, the state of old age will be a pleasant afterglow to life, a placid preparation for death.

Strangely enough, the fear of death is one of the things that geriatricians don't have to worry about much. Old people seldom think of it, and when they do they think of it with resignation. They are much more acutely concerned with life.

Some of the things that can be done for old people are fairly easy. All that is required is a few million pounds—if

only the money can be dragged away from armaments. These are the medical, bodily things. Various parts of the body, especially the glands and the heart, tend to go a bit haywire after sixty or seventy years' work. As far as the glands are concerned, at least, the matter is not too difficult to put right, though it does cost money. The heart is a much more difficult problem because you can't give pills that will do the heart's work. But even here there are encouraging signs. If enough research is done on the job, you may be sure that a way will be found.

One of the biggest plans for reducing the bodily ailments of old age is one that, unfortunately, won't be much use to old people now, though, if we are sensible, you and I could benefit by it. This is a scheme for mass education about how to live when young in preparation for old age. It is surprising how stupidly most people spend their lives from the medical point of view. They smoke to excess, drink to excess, mess up their digestions with the wrong kinds of food, breathe the wrong air—

and don't breathe it deep enough—sit in the wrong light in the wrong position and generally gallivant about as though death was around tomorrow's corner. To say nothing of what they do to their minds!

Of course, as every medical man knows, it's hell's own job trying to get people to do sensible things with their bodies. When they are just about ready to drop, maybe, they will take some notice. Frequently they drop all the same.

The new method of education for old age will begin in the most sensible place, school. Not just with verbal teaching, but with all kinds of material approaches, such as properly designed seats, efficient lighting and air conditioning. And there will be a good deal of gentle persuasion brought to bear in such matters as the shapes of shoes. Maybe we shall get a new generation of girls who do not measure each other's worth by the length of their heels! Maybe—though God knows the task is gargantuan—we shall have a generation of women who

are not so puffed up with sexual pride that they clog their pores with mush and torture their trunks with girdles, roll-ons and all their other exhibitive appurtenances.

Men, too, may grow up a little and exercise a modicum of restraint in their more carnal appetites—such as not thinking that they are big strong men if they can smoke fifty a day and drink ten pints a night.

Then comes the business of teaching people how to eat good food—which is *not* found in tins, whatever the posters may say. True, they'll have to learn to take a little more trouble about preparing their meals; that way they may not rush them so much, as if eating were some trifling chore they were compelled to carry out by law—instead of the fundamental activity which keeps us all alive and healthy. They will learn the simple fact that every speck of their bodies is compounded of the food they eat. They will learn the slightly less simple fact that the body has a number of preferences about the kind of

food it will efficiently utilise, and that if the wrong foods go in something, somewhere, is going to suffer—usually a couple of decades later.

One very important part of the educational programme will be to teach youngsters that they have spines. Look around you in the street, in trains, in pubs, anywhere. You will see people of all ages walking and standing about as though there were a chunk of concrete on their necks. Look in the mirror, too!

Still, all those things are founded in neglect and it will not take very long to get people to stop neglecting these aspects of their lives, and then there will be far fewer medical problems assailing the aged. A very, very different matter is the troubles of the mind.

When an old person goes to a doctor and complains of some bodily condition, the doctor does his best about that, and then—if he is a good doctor—chats about the patient's life. Invariably he will find psychological problems. So he would, of course,

if he closely questioned any patient of any age. We've all got our troubles, Lord knows. But with the elderly patients, the psychological difficulties are much more obtrusive into their everyday lives. They are the foreground to them, not the background as they are to us.

The most common mental ill of old age is loneliness. You have to think about the old person's position a long time before you can get to grips with what this word really means. It is not just a matter of wanting someone around to look at and to talk to, and to cuss. True, that is part of it. It is what we feel now and then, and the old person feels all the time. But the loneliness of old age is a deeper and more general thing. Providing an old person with a companion solves only a tiny part of the problem. The old person does not feel lonely because he has lost his friends, but because he has lost the whole world. No one—not even strangers on 'buses and trains—takes any notice of him any more. When he was younger and went into a shop,

another customer might well strike up a very brief and, at the time, pointless, conversation. But that doesn't happen any more. People look at him and see an old man, someone of no account, a has-been. Somehow it just doesn't occur to them to talk to *him*. It's like being sent to Coventry by the entire human race!

And this goes on day after day. There is no foreseeable end to it in the old person's eyes. Is it really a wonder that they face death so resignedly?

Because of this peculiar kind of loneliness the solution to the biggest mental problem of old age lies in reorientating young people! People who are not old have got to be made to realise that age does not necessarily go hand in hand with idiocy, that old people can still think and talk with the best of them—unless they've been left without thought and talk for some years. This is not so much a matter of accepting old people into their world, as of *never casting them out*.

Next to loneliness comes this business of dependence—though we should of course realise that the troubles of the mind overlap and cannot be neatly parcelled up in the way we have to when talking about them. There is something in all of us which, praise the Lord, has not yet been given a scientific name, but which makes us feel joy when someone is dependent upon us for something. It may simply be that our cricket club “depends on us” to put up a stiff bat, or that a friend “depends on us” to help him out of a jam, or that the lady who has fallen over in the street “depends on us” to help her to her feet. All these things—which happen every day to the young person—make us feel that we are, indeed, of some account in the world. Maybe we don’t have much say in who lets loose on who with the hydrogen bomb, maybe nobody asks *us* whether we should lend a hundred million pounds to Patagonia, but at least the club looked to us and the friend was grateful and the lady gave us a smile

for doing what she knew we would. But though the old person is in the same position as we are with respect to the hydrogen bomb and the big loan, he hasn’t got those little dependencies to keep his ego going.

Of course, there are many things for which the aged cannot be depended upon. Nevertheless, they are not as helpless and incompetent as the rest of us make out. With a bit of coercion it will be possible one day to ensure that people allow the aged to use what powers they have to the full. Then there’ll be no frustration. Then there’ll be that much more happiness in the world.

So you see it is no good just sitting back and expecting all these brilliant minds to do all the work as though they were conjurors. *You* have to play a part, too. The brilliant minds will help you by telling you what to do. Nobody’s going to make you do it. But you’ll be a better person if you do. And you can start today. Remember, if you’re lucky, you’ll be old one day, too.

The romance of space is wonderful—
for those who can actually participate.
But what of those who cannot?

LIKE A DIAMOND

by ALICE BEECHAM

EVERY EVENING, BEFORE getting into bed, Sheila would stand at her window and watch for the passing of the Alpha Platform. Sometimes, if the weather was bad for example, she couldn't see it and, at other times during the long summer evenings, she wasn't sure if she had missed the little gleamingspeck or not, but mostly she could see it as it passed from south to north far up above. And whenever she saw it she repeated a nursery rhyme and made a wish.

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star,
How I wonder what you are,
Up above the earth so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.*

The wish, like the rhyme, was always the same.

It always gave her a funny feeling to watch the tiny mote, so bright and so high, as it passed overhead. It was like watching a part of herself, and she always felt very sad as she finally climbed into bed with her big, woolly teddybear and the old dolly with the missing hair. It looked so awfully far away, so remote, just as though it didn't belong to the world at all, and that frightened her because she kept thinking of what would happen if it ever flew away.

That was why she said the rhyme and made the wish. The rhyme wasn't important

really, especially as she knew the answer to the first two lines, but she thought that it might help the wish to come true, and that was very important indeed.

She hoped that it might be granted before the platform fell down or ran away.

Not that it could, of course; everyone kept telling her that, and most of them laughed at her for being worried. Miss Hinkle hadn't laughed. She had kept Sheila behind at school one day just to explain it to her and show her why it could never happen. Sheila liked Miss Hinkle and trusted her, and had looked and listened and nodded, and said that she was quite satisfied with what the teacher had told her. But she hadn't been, really. It just didn't make sense that the platform would stay as it was for ever and ever. She had thought that about the helicopter and she had been wrong.

That had happened a long time ago when they had all

gone to the fair. It had been a wonderful day with plenty of rides on the roundabouts and plenty of ice cream and fluffy, sticky stuff to eat. She had even ridden on the back of a real, live donkey and had won a balloon for throwing darts at a board. She had been proud of that balloon, even though the man had called it a consolation prize, and she had cried when it had burst. That was when mummy had shown her the helicopter.

It was a big one, bigger than a house, and it hovered above the fairground like the dragon-fly picture in one of her books. It had seemed so safe, so firmly fastened to the sky, just as if it were painted on the blue and white. There had been people in it, lots of people, and they had leaned out of the windows and one of them had waved to her. She had waved back, laughing as she forgot the loss of her balloon and staring at the way the people's hair had shifted and moved as if blown by a strong wind.

She had still been staring at it when it fell.

It had frightened her, that fall. One second the big machine had been fastened to the sky, the next it had made a funny sound and down it had come. And it had fallen so fast. Not a bit like a leaf or a bird, or a flake of snow. It had dropped like a stone, and the sound it made when it hit the ground had been horrible. And if an ordinary helicopter could fall like that, then why not the Alpha Platform?

To Sheila there was no reason, and so every night before going to bed, she waited and watched for it to pass by so that she could make sure it was still safe. And every time she saw it she said her rhyme and made her wish.

Tonight she had missed it. Bedtime had been early and there had been some cloud, but even then she was sure she would have seen it had it been there to see. She worried about it in bed and kept

thinking of that helicopter and the sounds it had made when it fell. Nasty sounds, not a bit like the ones her pram had made when once it had fallen downstairs by accident. That had been a cheerful banging and clanging, and she had laughed and clapped her hands and had only cried when she saw how badly the pram had been bent and scratched. She had asked her teacher about it, and Miss Hinkle had said that it was due to the rush of wind against the vanes, but that didn't make sense, either. Wind just didn't make that kind of sound. Moaning, yes, she had heard it moan during the winter when all the windows were shut and she cuddled warm and snug in bed. But not screaming and crying, never that.

Thinking about it made her even more worried and frightened, so that she lay in the dimness, eyes wide open, staring at the pale rectangle of the window. She wondered if she should get up and look for the platform again. It

wasn't late, not really, just deep twilight, and that was the best time of all to see it. She stared doubtfully at the illuminated face of the clock and wished that she was big enough to tell the time. Miss Hinkle had told her that the platform circled every two hours, and that it didn't pass overhead each time. She had said that, though the platform didn't change its direction, the Earth revolved beneath it so that it was only overhead every twelve hours.

Sheila wasn't quite sure what she meant by that, though it was true that sometimes she missed it on clear evenings, only to see it the next night. Could this be one of those times?

Lying with her eyes open only made her more wakeful than ever. Dolly was no company; she had gone to sleep as soon as she had been put to bed. Teddy bear was better; at least his eyes were still open and he squeaked a little when she cuddled him. She squeezed him again and

then a third time before she remembered that it was cruel to make him stay awake when he should be asleep. So she tucked him under the covers and stared again at the window.

Maybe if she said the wish very hard to herself it would work just as if she had actually seen the platform. She was beginning to lose faith in the power of wishing. She had tried so hard for so long and still it hadn't come true. Perhaps the rhyme was wrong? She frowned as she thought about it. Witches and wizards in her story books always said a rhyme when they wanted to make something happen, and that was the only rhyme she knew which seemed to fit. Of course she knew that the platform wasn't a star, and she knew what it was. Miss Hinkle had shown her big pictures of it, but it was still high above the Earth so that part of it was right.

But why hadn't she been able to see it? She had always

seen it before when she knew where to look, but tonight she had missed it. Could it have fallen? Could it have flown away? Panic gripped her and, before she knew quite what she was doing, she had thrown back the covers and was padding on small, bare feet towards the window.

She was standing there when mummy came in to see if everything was all right.

"Sheila!" Mummy came towards her, her face anxious. "What are you doing out of bed, darling? Why aren't you asleep?"

"I missed it," said Sheila. She shivered a little. The long wait had made her cold, and she had to stop her teeth from chattering as she spoke. "I'm waiting to see it to tell it goodnight."

"The platform?" Mummy smiled and shook her head. "What a goose you are! The way you worry about that platform anyone would think the world depended on it."

She bent forward, smelling of face powder and flowers. "You're cold, darling. Get into bed now."

"But I missed it," said Sheila, as if that explained and excused everything. "I didn't see it, and I'm worried because it may not be there."

"Of course it's there." Mummy shook her head the way she always did when they talked about the platform. "Nothing can possibly happen to it. I keep telling you that."

"I didn't see it," said Sheila stubbornly. Suddenly she was afraid that she would have to go back to bed without seeing it at all. The fear mounted at the possibility that it wasn't there to see at all. Grown-ups were like that. When the helicopter had fallen no one would tell her what had happened. They kept telling her to forget it, and wouldn't answer when she had asked what had made those ugly noises. Perhaps mummy knew that the platform had fallen and was

afraid to tell her in case she shouldn't sleep?

"I want to see it," she said desperately. "Please, mummy. I want to see it."

"No, darling." Mummy sounded very firm. "It's so late. You should have been asleep a long while ago. It isn't good for little girls to stay up so late. You don't want to go to school with red eyes, do you? That's what happens if you don't get your sleep."

"Just this once, mummy. Please."

"Not even just this once." Mummy moved to pick her up and Sheila twisted from her hands. "Now, Sheila!"

"I want to see the platform."

"You can't, darling. It won't be here for a long time yet, and by that time you'll be asleep. Why not wait until tomorrow night and see it then?"

"No." Sheila began to tremble at the thought of never seeing it again. "It may not be there tomorrow

night. It may never be back at all."

"That's nonsense, Sheila."

"Then if it's nonsense, why not let me stay up to see it tonight?" Sheila looked appealingly at her mother. "Please, mummy. Please let me stay up."

"Now don't be silly, Sheila. Get into bed and I'll tuck you in."

She tried hard to be brave, but she couldn't help it when the tears came. She stood before the window, clean and neat in her animal-pattern pyjamas, her unbraided hair hanging over her shoulders, her little round face all puckered and crinkled as the tears ran over her cheeks. She cried as only a child can cry, openly, intensely, her little body shaking as though her heart would break.

"It's gone," she sobbed. "It's fallen. You know it and won't tell me."

"Darling!" All at once mummy was on her knees and

had her arms about her. "That isn't true."

"Yes it is. It's gone and I'll never see it again, and . . . and . . ." Her words dissolved in a fresh storm of weeping.

"Look at me, Sheila." Mummy tilted her chin so that she could see her face. "Is that why you couldn't sleep?"

Sheila nodded.

"But the platform can't fall, dear. Didn't Miss Hinkle tell you that?"

Sheila nodded.

"Then why are you so worried, darling?"

"The helicopter fell," said Sheila. "No one thought it was going to fall, but it did. Let me see the platform, mummy."

"But it's perfectly safe, darling. What happened to that helicopter couldn't happen . . ." Mummy's face softened as she looked at her. "All right, Sheila, we'll wait up for the platform."

"Both of us?"

"Yes." Mummy smiled as she looked at the clock. "Now

jump back into bed while I heat up some milk. Quick now! If you're not in bed by the time I count three I'll change my mind."

Mummy didn't mean it, Sheila knew, but all the same she got back into bed as fast as she could. It was warm beneath the covers and she hugged the eiderdown around her chin as she waited for mummy to bring in the hot milk. She felt all excited, just as she had that time when they had all gone to see the rockets with their roaring tails and tiny bodies. She hadn't thought about that day for a long time now because that had been the day she had first started to make a wish.

Mummy was a long time heating the milk and Sheila was getting impatient by the time she returned with the tall glass and the long spoon. Mummy seemed different, somehow, smiling with a happy smile instead of just lifting the corners of her mouth as she did when she

was tired or miserable. She put a chair before the window and a cushion on the seat and Sheila sat down with a blanket around her shoulders and the milk in her hand.

Then mummy sat beside her and together they stared up at the sky.

"It will pass towards the east," said mummy, and pointed to the right. "You'll have to be sharp or you'll miss it again."

"I won't miss it," promised Sheila and sipped at her milk. She had a white moustache when she lifted her head from the glass, and mummy laughed as she wiped it away.

"What do you think of when you see it, darling?"

"Lots of things." Sheila wriggled comfortably on the cushion. "Sometimes I think of it running away so that we'll never see it again. And sometimes I think of it falling just like that helicopter did. But mostly I just say a spell and make a wish."

"A spell?"

"That's right." Sheila drank more milk. "It isn't really a spell, not like the ones the witches make, but it's the only one I know."

"Tell it to me," said mummy. "Is it hard to learn?"

Sheila told her.

"That's a wonderful spell," said mummy, and in the light from the window her eyes glistened just as they had done that time when they had all gone to see the rockets. "And you make a wish?"

"Yes, mummy, but I mustn't tell you that because if I do then it won't come true, will it?"

"So they say, dear." Mummy must have had something in her eyes, because she rubbed at them with a handkerchief. "But you don't have to tell me, because I know what it is." She put away the handkerchief and smiled. "I wish, too, you know."

"Do you say the spell?"

"No, but is that important?"

"It could be." Sheila finished the milk and put down the glass. She felt very big and important because she knew the correct spell and mummy didn't. "Still, if we both make the same wish I don't suppose it will matter very much who says the spell." Impatiently, she stared out of the window. "Is it time yet?"

"Not yet, dear." Mummy smiled as she glanced towards the clock. "A few more minutes and then you'll see it. Will you say it then?"

"I say it every time I see it," said Sheila importantly. "I must have said it hundreds of times." She bit her lip with sudden doubt. "Not," she confessed, "that it seems to do much good."

"Yes it does," said mummy, and squeezed her until she gasped. "Darling, suppose I told you that your wish is going to come true. Would you worry any more?"

"Is it going to come true, mummy?"

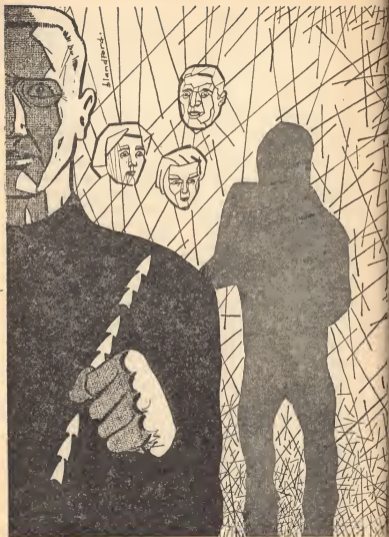
"Yes. Oh, yes! Next week, maybe, or at the latest in ten days. I had a message while I was heating your milk." Mummy was really crying now, but they were happy tears, not sad tears, and so Sheila didn't mind them a bit. "It's been a year, darling, a whole year, but now it's over." Mummy smiled and wiped her eyes, then pointed out of the window. "There it is, Sheila! Look!"

"Where?" Sheila felt panic as she searched the sky; then, as she saw it, she relaxed and smiled. It was so high, so small, just like a distant star, and as she saw it she automatically said the spell.

*Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are,
Up above the earth so high,
Like a diamond in the sky.*

"The wish," said mummy quietly. "Say the wish out loud just this once."

Sheila nodded and stared towards the racing fleck of light. "Goodnight, daddy," she whispered. "I wish that you were home."





LET ME LIVE IN A HOUSE

**The little man wasn't there, he
couldn't be—but he stood in the
rain and knocked on the door**

by CHAD OLIVER

IT WAS ALL EXACTLY PERFECT, down to the last scratch on the white picket fence and the frigidaire that wheezed asthmatically at predictable intervals throughout the night.

The two white cottages rested lightly on their fresh green lawns, like contented

dreams. They were smug in their completeness. They had green shutters and substantial brass door knockers. They had clean, crisp curtains on the windows, and knick-knacks on the mantelpieces over the fireplaces. They had a fragment of poetry, caught in

dime-store frames in the halls:
*Let me live in a house by the
 side of the road and be a
 friend to man.*

One of the cottages had a picture of crusty old Grandfather Walters, and that was important.

Soft and subtle sounds hummed through the warm air. One of the sounds was that of a copter, high overhead, but you couldn't see it, of course. A breeze sighed across the grass, but the grass was motionless. Somewhere, children laughed and shouted as they clambered and splashed in the old swimming hole.

There were no children, naturally—nor any swimming hole, for that matter.

It was all exactly perfect, though. *Exactly*. If you didn't know better, you'd swear it was real.

Gordon Collier breathed in the smell of flowers that didn't exist and stared without enthusiasm at the white clouds that drifted along through a robin's-egg-blue sky.

"Damn it all," he said.

He kicked at the green grass under his feet and failed to dent it. Then he walked into his snug white cottage and slammed the door behind him, hard.

Helen called from the kitchen: "Don't slam the door, dear."

"I'm sorry," Gordon said. "It slipped."

Helen came bustling in. She was an attractive, if hardly spectacular, woman of thirty. She had brown hair and eyes and a domestic manner. She kissed her husband lightly. "Been over at the Walters'?" she asked.

"How did you guess?" Gordon said. Where did she *think* he had been—outside?

"Now, Gordey," Helen admonished him. "You needn't snap my head off for asking a civil question."

"Please don't call me 'Gordey'," Gordon said irritably. Then he relented—it wasn't her fault, after all. He gave her the news about the Walters. "Bart's playing foot-

ball," he related for the millionth time, "and Mary is watching tri-di."

"Will they be dropping over for cards tonight?" Helen asked.

She's playing the game to the hilt, Gordon thought. She's learned her part like a machine. I wish I could do that.

"They'll be over," he said.

Helen's eyes lighted up happily. She had always loved company, Gordon remembered. "My!" she exclaimed. "I'd better see about supper." She smiled eagerly, like a dog at a rabbit, and hustled away back to the kitchen.

Gordon Collier watched his wife go, not without admiration of a sort. They had certainly picked well when they picked Bart, who could sit for hours with his electric football game, reliving the past, or who could with equal absorption paint charmingly naive pictures about the stars. Mary, too, was fine—as long as she had her tri-di set, her life was complete. But when they had picked his wife, they had hit

the nail on the head. She was perfect in her part—she gave the impression of actually believing in it.

Gordon frowned sourly at himself. "The trouble with you, Gordon," he said softly, "is that you just haven't learned your lines very well."

There was a reason for that, too—but he preferred not to think about it.

After supper—steak and fried potatoes and salad and coffee—the doorbell rang. It was, of course, the Walters.

"Well!" exclaimed Helen. "If it isn't Bart and Mary!"

In they came—Mary, grey at forty, looking to see if the tri-di was on, and Barton, big and wholesome as a vitamin ad., bounding through the door as though it were the enemy goal line.

Four people, Gordon thought. Four people, utterly alone. Four human beings, pretending to be a society.

Four people.

They exchanged such small talk as there was. Since they

had all been doing precisely the same things for seven months, there wasn't much in the way of startling information to be passed back and forth. The bulk of the conversation was taken up with Mary's opinion of the latest tri-di shows, and it developed that she liked them all.

She turned on Gordon's set, which didn't please him unduly, and for half an hour they watched a variety show—canned and built into the set, of course—that was mainly distinguished by its singular lack of variety of any sort. Finally, in desperation, Gordon got out the cards.

"We'll make it poker tonight," he decided as they all sat down at the collapsible green card table. He dealt out four hands of three-card draw, shoved a quarter into the centre of the table, and settled back to enjoy the game as best he could.

It wasn't easy. Mary turned up the tri-di in order to hear better, and Barton engaged with furious energy in his

favourite pastime—replaying the 1973 Stanford-Notre Dame game, with himself in the starring role.

At eleven o'clock sharp Helen served the cheese and crackers.

At midnight, they heard the new sound.

It was a faint whistle, and it hissed over their heads like an ice-coated snake. It sizzled in from far away, and then there was a long, still pause. Finally, there was a shadowy suggestion of a thump.

Gordon instantly cut off the tri-di set. They all listened. He opened a window and looked out. He couldn't see anything—the blue sky had switched to the deep purple of night and the only glimmer of light came from the porch lamp on the cottage next door. There was nothing to see, and all that he heard were the normal sounds that weren't really there—the chirp of crickets, the soft sigh of the breeze.

"Did you hear it?" he asked the others.

They nodded, uncertain and suddenly alone. *A new sound.* How could that be?

Gordon Collier walked nervously out of the room, followed by Barton. He clenched his fists, feeling the clammy sweat in the palms of his hands, and fought to keep the fear from surging up within him. They walked into a small hall and Gordon pressed a button. A section of the wall slid smoothly back on oiled runners, and the two men walked into the white, brightly-lighted equipment room.

Gordon kept his hand steady and flipped on the outside scanners. He couldn't see a thing. He tried the tracer screen, and it was blank. Barton tried the radio, on the off chance that someone was trying to contact them. There was silence.

They checked the radar charts for the past hour. They were all quite normal—except the last one. That one had a streak on it, a very sharp and clear and unmistakable streak.

It was in the shape of an arc, and it curved down in a grimly familiar way. It started far out in space and it ended. Outside—— Outside in the ice and the rocks and the cold.

"Probably a meteor," Barton suggested.

"Probably," Gordon agreed dubiously, and made a note to that effect in the permanent record.

"Well, what else *could* it have been?" Barton challenged.

"Nothing," Gordon admitted. "It was a meteor."

They swung the wall shut again, covering the tubes and screens and coils with flowered wallpaper and Gainsborough's *Blue Boy*. They returned to the living room, where their wives still sat around the card table waiting for them. The room was as comfortable as ever, and the tri-di set was on again.

It was all just as they had left it, Gordon thought—but it was different. The room

seemed smaller, constricted, isolated. The temperature had not changed, but it was colder. Millions and millions of miles flowed into the room and crawled around the walls . . .

"Just a meteor, I guess," Gordon said.

They went on with their game for another hour, and then Barton and Mary went home to bed. Before they left, they invited Gordon and Helen to visit them the next night.

The house was suddenly empty.

Gordon Collier held his wife in his arms and listened to the frigidaire wheezing in the kitchen and the water dripping from a half-closed faucet. Outside, there were only the crickets and the wind.

"It was only a meteor," he said.

"I know," said his wife.

They went to bed then, but sleep was slow in coming. They had a home, of course, a little white cottage in a

green yard. They had two nice neighbours and blue skies and a tri-di set. It was all exactly perfect, and there was certainly nothing to be afraid of.

But it was a long way back, and they had no ship.

When Gordon Collier awoke in the morning, he knew instantly that something was wrong. He swung himself out of bed and stood in the middle of the room, half-crouched, not sure what he was looking for.

The room seemed normal enough. The twin beds were in their proper places, the rug was smooth, his watch was still on the dresser where he had left it. He looked at the alarm clock and saw that it hadn't gone off yet. His wife was still asleep. What had awakened him?

He stood quite still and listened. At once, he heard it. It came from outside, out by the green lawn and the blue skies. He walked to the

window to make certain that his senses weren't playing tricks on him. The sound was still there—another *new* sound. Another new sound where there could *be* no new sounds, but only the old ones, repeating themselves over and over again . . .

He closed the window, trying to shut it out. Perhaps, he told himself, it wasn't exactly a new sound after all; perhaps it was only the old sound distorted by a faulty speaker or a bad tube. There had been gentle breezes before, summery puffs and wisps of air, and even the gentle patter of light rain once every two weeks. He listened again, straining his ears, but he did not open the window. His heart beat spasmodically in his chest. No, there could be no doubt of it!

The wind was rising.

Helen moaned in her sleep and Gordon decided not to awaken her. She might need her sleep and then some before this was over, he knew. He dressed and walked out into

the hall, pressed the button that opened the equipment room, and went inside. He checked everything—dials, scanners, tracers, charts. Again, they were all quite normal except one. One of the tracers showed a faint line coming in from the ice and the rocks, in toward the two isolated cottages that huddled under the Bubble.

Presumably, it was still there—whatever it was.

The significant question was easily formulated: what did the line represent, the line that had curved down out of space and had now cut across the ice almost to his very door? What could it represent?

Gordon Collier forced himself to think logically, practically. It wasn't easy, not after seven months of conditioned living that had been specially designed so that he *wouldn't* think in rational terms. He closed the door, shutting off the little white house and all that it represented. He sat down on a hard metal chair with only the

gleaming machines for company. He tried.

It was all too plain that he couldn't contact Earth. His radio wouldn't reach that far, and, anyhow, who was there to listen at the other end? The ship from Earth wasn't due for another five months, so he could expect no help from that source. In an emergency, the two women wouldn't be of much help. As for Bart, what he would do would depend on what *kind* of an emergency he had to face.

What kind of an emergency *was* it? He didn't know, had no way of knowing. The situation was unprecedented. It was nothing much on the face of it—a whistle and a thump and a few lines on a tracer. *And the wind*, his mind whispered, *don't forget the wind*. Nothing much, but he was afraid. He looked at his white, trembling hands and doubted himself. What could he do?

What was out there?

The wall slid open behind

him and he bit his lip to keep from crying out.

"Breakfast is ready, dear," his wife said.

"Yes, yes," Gordon murmured shakily. "Yes, I'm coming."

He got to his feet and followed his wife out of the room, back into the comfortable cottage that he knew so well. He kept his eyes straight ahead of him as he walked and tried not to listen to the swelling moan of the wind that couldn't blow.

Gordon Collier drank his coffee black and dabbled at the poached converter eggs, trying to fake an appetite that he did not feel. His wife ate her breakfast in normal fashion, chattering familiar morning-talk in an inconsequential stream. Gordon didn't pay much attention until a stray sentence or two struck home.

"Just listen to that wind, Gordey," she said, with only a trace of strain in her voice. "I

declare, I believe we're in for a storm!"

Collier forced himself to go on drinking his coffee, but he was badly shaken. *Her mind won't even accept the situation for what it is*, he thought with a chill. *She's going to play the game out to the bitter end. I'm ALONE.*

"That's right, dear," he said evenly, fighting to keep his voice steady. "We're in for a storm."

Outside, the wind whined around the corners of the little cottage and something that might have been thunder rumbled in from far away.

The afternoon was a nightmare.

Gordon Collier stood at the window and watched. He didn't want to do it, but something deep within him would not let him turn away. His wife stayed huddled in front of the tri-di, watching a meaningless succession of pointless programmes, and doubtless she was better off than he was. But he had to

watch, even if it killed him. Dimly, he sensed that it was his responsibility to watch.

There wasn't much to see, of course. The robin's-egg-blue sky had turned an impossible, leaden grey, and the fleecy white clouds were tinged with a dismal black. The neat green grass seemed to have lost some of its vitality; it looked dead, like the artificial thing that it was. From far above his head—almost to the inner surface of the Bubble, he judged—little flickerings of light played across the sky.

The visual frequencies were being tampered with, that was all. It wouldn't do to get all excited about it.

The sounds were worse. Thunder muttered and rolled down from above. The faint hum of a copter high in the sky changed to a high-pitched screech, the sound of an aircraft out of control and falling. He waited and waited for the crash, but of course it never came. There was only the screech that went on and on and on, for ever.

The auditory frequencies were being tampered with, that was all. *It wouldn't do to get all excited about it.*

When the laughing children who were splashing in the old swimming hole began to scream, Gordon Collier shut the window.

He sank down in a chair and buried his face in his hands. He wanted to shout, throw things, cry, *anything*. But he couldn't. His mind was numb. He could only sit there in the chair by the window and wait for the unknown.

It was almost evening when the rain came. It came in sheets and torrents, and splattered on the window panes. It ran down the windows in gurgling rivulets and made puddles in the yard. It was *real* rain.

Gordon Collier looked at the water falling from a place where water could not be and began to whimper with fright.

Precisely at nine o'clock,

Gordon and Helen dug up two old raincoats out of the hall closet and walked next door through the storm. They rang the doorbell and stood shivering in the icy rain until Mary opened the door and spilled yellow light out into the blackness.

They entered the cottage, which was an exact replica of their own except for the austere frowning portrait of Grandfather Walters in the front hall. They stood dripping on the rug until Bart came charging in from the living room, grinning with pleasure at seeing them again.

"What a storm!" he said loudly. "Reminds me of the time we played UCLA in a cloudburst—here, let me take your coats."

Gordon clenched his fists helplessly. Bart and Mary weren't facing the situation either; they were simply adapting to it frantically and hoping it would go away. *Well, his mind demanded, what else can they do?*

They went through the

ritual of playing cards. This time it was bridge instead of poker, but otherwise it was the same. It always was, except for holidays.

Outside, the incredible storm ripped furiously at the cottage. The roof began to leak, ever so slightly, and a tiny drip began to patter away ironically in the middle of the bridge table. No one said anything about it.

Gordon played well enough to keep up appearances, but his mind wasn't on the game. He loaded his pipe with his own ultra-fragrant bourbon-soaked tobacco, and retreated behind a cloud of smoke.

He had himself fairly well under control now. The worst was probably over, for him. He could at least think about it—that was a triumph, and he was proud of it.

Here they were, he thought—four human beings on a moon as big as a planet, three hundred and ninety million miles from the Earth that had sent them there. Four human

beings, encased in two little white cottages under an air bubble on the rock and ice that was Ganymede. Here they were—waiting.

Waiting for the ship from home that was not due for five months. Waiting all alone in an abandoned solar system, with only sound effects and visual gimmicks for company. Waiting in an empty universe, sustained by a faith in something that had almost been lost.

They were skeleton crews, waiting for the firm flesh to come and clothe their bones. It would not happen today, and it would not happen tomorrow. It might never happen—now.

It was unthinkable that any ship from Earth could be in the vicinity. It was unthinkable that their equipment could have broken down, changed, by itself.

So they were waiting, he thought—but not for the ship from Earth. No, they were waiting for—what?

At eleven o'clock, the storm stopped abruptly and there was total silence.

At midnight, there was a knock on the door.

It was one of those moments that stand alone, cut off and isolated from the conceptual flow of time. It stood quite still, holding its breath.

The knock was repeated— impatiently.

"Someone is at the door," Mary said dubiously.

"That's right," Bart said. "We must have visitors."

No one moved. The four human beings sat paralysed around the table, their cards still in their hands, precisely as though they were waiting for some imaginary servant to open the door and see who was outside. Gordon Collier found himself relatively calm, but he knew that it was not a natural calmness. He was conditioned, too, like the rest of them. He studied them with intense interest. Could they even swallow this insane knock on the door, digest it, fit

it somehow into their habitual thought patterns?

Apparently, they could.

"See to the door, dear," Mary told her husband. "I wonder who it could be this time of night?"

The knock was repeated a third time. Whoever—or whatever—was outside, Gordon thought, sounded irritated.

Reluctantly, Bart started to get up. Gordon beat him to it, however, pushing back his chair and getting to his feet. "Let me go," he said. "I'm closer."

He walked across the room to the door. It seemed a longer way than he had ever noticed before. The stout wood door seemed very thin. He put his hand on the door knob, and was dimly conscious of the fact that Bart had gotten up and followed him across the room. He looked at the door, a scant foot before his eyes. The knock came again—sharply, impatiently, a no-nonsense knock. Gordon visualised the heavy brass door knocker on

the other side of the door. To whom, or what, did the hand that worked that knocker belong? Or *was* it a hand?

Almost wildly, Gordon remembered a string of jokes that had made the rounds when he was a boy. Jokes about the little man who turned off the light in the refrigerator when you closed the door. Jokes about a little man—what had they called him?

The little man who wasn't there.

Gordon shook his head. That kind of reaction wouldn't do, he told himself. He had to be calm. He asked himself a question: *What are you waiting for?*

He gritted his teeth and opened the door, fast.

The little man *was* there, and he was tapping his foot. But he was not exactly a little man, either. He was somewhat vague, amorphous—he was, you might say, *almost* a little man.

"It's about time," the almost-man said in a blurred

voice. "But first, a word from our sponsor. May I come in?"

Stunned, Gordon Collier felt himself moving aside and the little man hustled past him into the cottage.

The almost-man stood apart from the others, hesitating. He wasn't really a little man, Gordon saw with some relief; that is, he wasn't a gnome or an elf or anything like that. Gordon recognised with a start the state of his own mental processes that had even allowed him to imagine that it *could* be some supernatural creature out there on the green lawn, knocking at the door. He fought to clear his mind, and knew that he failed.

Gordon caught one thought and held on, desperately: *If this is an alien, all that I have worked for is finished. The dream is ended.*

The almost-man—changed. He solidified, became real. He *was* a man—elderly, a bit pompous, neatly dressed in an old-fashioned business suit

with a conservative blue tie. He had white hair and a neat, precise moustache. His blue eyes twinkled.

"I am overwhelmed," he said clearly, waving a thin hand in the air. "My name is John. You are too kind to a poor old country boy."

Gordon stared. The man was a dead ringer for the portrait of Grandfather Walters on the wall.

Bart and Mary and Helen just looked blankly at the man, trying to adjust to the enormity of what had happened. Bart had resumed his seat at the bridge table, and had even picked up his hand. Helen was watching Gordon, who still stood by the door. Mary sat uncertainly, dimly realising that she was the hostess here, and waiting for the proper stimulus that would prod her into a patterned routine of welcome. The house waited—a stage set for a play, with the actors all in place and the curtain half-way up.

Gordon Collier slammed the door, fighting to clear his

mind from the gentle fog that lapped at it, that made everything all right. "What in the hell is the big idea?" he asked the man who looked like Grandfather Walters and whose name was John.

"Gordey!" exclaimed Helen.

"That's no way to talk to company," Mary said.

John faced Gordon, ignoring the others. His moustache bristled. He spread his hands helplessly. "I am a simple wayfaring stranger," he said. "I happened to pass by your door, and since you live in a house by the side of the road, I assumed that you would wish to be a friend to man."

Gordon Collier started to laugh hysterically, but smothered it before the laughter exploded nakedly into the room. "*Are you a man?*" he asked.

"Certainly not," John said indignantly.

Gordon Collier clenched his fists until his fingernails drew blood from the palms

of his hands. He tried to use his mind, to free it, to fight. He could not, and he felt the tears of rage in his eyes. *I must* he thought, *I must, I must, I MUST.*

He closed his eyes. The ritual had been broken, the lulling pattern was no more. He told himself: *Somewhere in this madness there is a pattern that will reduce it to sanity. It is up to me to find it; that is why I am here. I must fight this thing, whatever it is. I must clear my mind and I must fight. I must get behind the greasepaint and the special effects and deal with whatever is underneath. This is the one test I must not fail.*

"Would you care for a drink?" he asked the man who looked like Grandfather Walters.

"Not particularly," John told him. "In fact, the thought appals me."

Gordon Collier turned and walked out into the kitchen, took a bottle of Bart's best Scotch out of the cupboard,

and drank two shots straight. Then he methodically mixed a Scotch and soda, and stood quite still, trying to think.

He *had* to think.

This wasn't insane, he had to remember that. It *seemed* to be, and that was important. Things didn't just happen, he knew; there was always an explanation, if you could just find it. Certainly, these two little cottages out here on Ganymede were fantastic enough unless you knew the story behind them. You would never guess, looking at them, that they were the tail end of a dream, a dream that man was trying to stuff back into the box . . .

Again, the thought came: *If this is an alien, all that I have worked for is finished. The dream is ended.* And a further thought: *Unless they never find out, back on Earth.*

Those thoughts. They drummed so insistently through his mind. Were they his, really? Or were they, too, part of the conditioning? He shook his head. He could not

think clearly; his mind was clogged. He would have to feel his way along.

He was desperately aware that he was not reacting rationally to the situation in which he found himself. None of it made sense; there was too much trickery. But how could he cut through to the truth?

He didn't know.

He *did* know that there was danger with him in the house, danger that was beyond comprehension.

He tried to be calm. He walked back into the living room to face the three people who were less than human and the strange man who had walked in out of infinity.

Gordon Collier entered the room and stopped. He forced his mind to accept the scene in matter-of-fact terms. He reached out for reality and held on tight.

There was the bridge table, and there Helen and Mary and Bart, their cards in their hands, caught between action

and non-action. There was the homey furniture, and the knick-knacks on the mantelpiece over the non-functional fireplace. Out in the kitchen, the frigidaire wheezed. There was the line of poetry: *Let me live in a house by the side of the road and be a friend to man*. There was the portrait of old Grandfather Walters.

There sat the man named John, who *was* Grandfather Walters, down to the last precise hair in his white moustache, the last wrinkle in his dreary grey business suit.

Outside, in a night alive with shadows, there was no sound at all.

"You have returned, as time will allow," John said. "No doubt you have your questions ready." He lit a cigarette, and the brand he smoked had not existed for twenty years. He dropped ashes on the rug.

"I can ask you questions, then," Gordon Collier said hesitantly.

"Certainly, my man. Please do. Valuable prizes."

Gordon frowned, not caring for the phrase "my man." And the oddly misplaced tri-di jargon was disconcerting, vaguely horrible. He fought to clear his mind.

"Are you our friend?"

"No."

"Our enemy?"

"No."

The three people at the bridge table watched, unmoving.

"Are you trying to—ummm—conquer the Earth?"

"My good man, what on Earth for?"

Gordon Collier tried to ignore the pun. It didn't fit. Nothing fitted. That was why he could not force his mind to see it all objectively, then. It was completely outside his experience, all of it.

Somewhere there is a pattern—

"What is this all about? What is going on?"

John's blue eyes twinkled. He lit another cigarette, dropping the other one on the

rug and grinding it out with his neatly polished black shoe. He said: "I have already told you that I am not a man. It follows that I am, from your point of view, an alien. I have nothing to hide. My actions are irrational to you, just as yours are to me. You are, in a way, a preliminary to food. There, is that clear?"

Gordon Collier stared at the man who looked like Grandfather Walters. *If this is an alien—*

His mind rebelled at the thought. It was absurd, fantastic. He tried to find another explanation, ignoring the shrieking danger signals in his mind. Suppose, now, that this was all a trick, a monstrous trick. John was not an alien at all—of course he wasn't—but a clever agent from Earth, out to wreck the dream.

"You say that you are an alien," he told John. "Prove it."

John shrugged, dropping ashes into the little pile on the rug. "The best proof would be highly unpleasant for you,"

he said. "But I can—the words are difficult, we're a little late, folks—take a story out of your mind and—the words are very hard—project it back to you again. Will that be good enough?"

"Prove it," Gordon Collier repeated, trying to be sure of himself. "Prove it."

John nodded agreeably. He looked around him, smiling.

The clock in the hall struck two.

Gordon Collier sat down. He leaned forward . . .

He saw a ship. It was very cold and dark. He saw—shadows—in the ship. He followed the ship. It had no home. It was nomadic. It fed on energy that it—absorbed—from other cultures. He saw one of the—shadows—more clearly. There were many shadows. They were watching him. He strained forward, could almost see them—

"I beg your pardon," John said loudly. "How clumsy of me."

The room was taut with fear.

"If at first you don't succeed," John said languidly, "try, try again. Let's see, my man—where shall we start?"

The question was rhetorical. Gordon Collier felt a jolt hit his mind. He felt himself slipping, tried to hold on. He failed. It began to come, out of the past.

Disjointed, at first. Jerky headlines, and then more . . .

MAN CONQUERS SPACE!

YANK SHIP LANDS ON MOON!

NEXT STOP MARS, SCIENTIST SAYS!

There had been more, under the headlines. Articles about how the space stations were going to end war by a very logical alchemy. Articles about rockets and jets and atomics. Articles about how to build a nice steel base on the Moon.

Gordon Collier laughed aloud and then stopped, suddenly. The three people at the bridge table stared at him mindlessly. John stabbed in his brain . . .

They had chattered away

quite glibly about weightlessness and gravity strains. They had built a perfect machine.

But there had been an imperfect machine inside it.

His name was man.

There were imperfect machines outside it, too. Villages and towns and cities filled to overflowing with them. Once the initial steps had been taken, once man was really in space at last, the reaction came. The true enormity of the task became all too obvious.

Space stations didn't cure wars, of course, any more than spears or rifles or atomic bombs had cured wars. Wars were culturally determined patterns of response to conflict situations; to get rid of wars, you had to change the pattern, not further implement it.

Space killed men. It sent them shrieking into the unknown in coffins of steel. It ripped them out of their familiar, protective cultures and hurled them a million miles into Nothing.

Space wasn't profitable. It gobbled up millions and billions into its gaping craw and it was never satiated. It didn't care about returning a profit. There was no profit to return.

Space was for the few. It was expensive. It took technical skills and training as its only passport. It was well to speak of dreams, but this dream had to be paid for. It took controls and taxes. Who paid the taxes? Who wanted the controls?

I work eight hours a day in a factory, the chorus chanted into the great emptiness. I got a wife and kids and when I come home at night I'm too tired to dream. I work hard. I earn my money. Why should I foot the bill for a four-eyed Glory Joe?

Space was disturbing. Sermons were spoken against it. Editorials were written against it. Laws were enacted against it—subtle laws, for controls were not wanted.

The rockets reached Luna and beyond—Mars and Venus and the far satellites of Jupiter

and Saturn. Equipment was set up, the trail was blazed at last.

But who would follow the trail? Where did it go? What did it get you when you got there?

Starburn leaves scars on the soul. Some men could not give up. Some men knew that man could not turn back.

Starburned men knew that dreams never really die.

They dwelt in fantastic loneliness, many of them, waiting. They waited for a few of their fellows on Earth to win over a hostile planet with advertising and lectures and closed-door sessions with industrialists. They fought to lay the long-neglected foundations for a skyscraper that already teetered precariously up into the sky and beyond.

Far out in space, the fragile network of men and ships held on tight and hoped.

"Let us revert to verbal communication again," John said with startling suddenness. "Projection is quite tiring."

Gordon Collier jerked back to the present and tried to adjust. He was aware, dimly, that he was being played with consummate skill. He thought of a fish that knew it had a hook in its mouth. What could he do about it? He tried to think . . .

"Of course," John went on—quite smoothly now—and lighting yet another cigarette, "your scientists, if I may apply the word to them, belatedly discovered that they could not simply isolate a man, or a man and a woman, in a steel hut on an alien world and go off and leave him for six months or a year, to empty your ethnocentric time scale. A man is so constituted that he is naked and defenceless without his culture, something he can live by and believe in."

Gordon Collier gripped his empty glass until he thought the glass would shatter. Could this man be reading his thoughts? A word came to him: *hypnosis*. It sounded nice. He tried to believe in it.

"In the long run, you see," John continued, "it is the totality of little things that goes to make up a culture. A man such as yourself does not simply sit in a room; he sits in a room of a familiar type, with pictures on the walls and dust in the corners and lamps on the tables. A man does not just eat; he eats special kinds of food that he has been conditioned to want, served as he has been trained to want them to be served, in containers he is accustomed to, in a social setting that he is familiar with, that he fits into, that he *belongs* in. All intelligent life is like that, you see."

Gordon waited, trying to think. He had almost had something there, but it was slipping away . . .

"Someone had to stay in space, of course," John said, dropping more ashes on the rug. "Someone had to man the stations and look after the equipment, and there was a more subtle reason; it was a distinct psychological advantage to have men already *in*

space, to prove that it could be done. The machines couldn't do everything, unfortunately for you, and so someone had to stay out here, and he had to stay sane—sane by your standards, of course."

Gordon Collier looked across at the three people who sat as though frozen around the forgotten bridge table, staring at him with blank dead-fish eyes. Helen, his wife. Bart and Mary. Sane? What did that mean? What was the price of sanity?

"And so," John continued in a bored voice, "man took his culture with him—the more provincial and reassuring and fixed the better. He took little white cottages and neighbourly customs, rooted them up out of their native soil, sealed them in cylinders of steel, and rocketed them off to barren little worlds of ice and darkness. I must say, Collier, that your mind has a frightfully melodramatic way of looking at things. Perhaps that was why the little white cottages and the neighbours

were not enough; in any event, conditioning was also necessary. No person operating at his full level of perception could possibly enact this farce you are living out here. And yet, without the farce you go mad. It is difficult to imagine a people less suited to space travel, don't you agree?"

Gordon Collier shrugged, feeling the cold sweat gathering in the palms of his hands.

"And there you are," John said, lighting another cigarette. "They are *much* milder. I have tried to demonstrate projection to you, on several different levels. I hope you will excuse the scattered editorial comments?"

Gordon Collier defensively reached out for a single line of reasoning and clung to it. If this were an alien, and the news got back to Earth, then the dream of space travel was finished. An advanced race already in space, added to all the other perils, would be the last straw. He, Gordon Collier, had dedicated his life to the dream. Therefore, it

could not end. Therefore John was human. It was all a trick.

His mind screamed its warning, but he thrust it aside.

He leaned forward, breathing hard. "I'll excuse them," he said slowly, "but I'll also call you a liar."

Outside, the night was still.

The sound had been turned off.

There was no storm now—no rain, nor thunder, nor lightning. There was no wind, not even whispers of a summer breeze. There were no crickets, and no night rustlings in the stuff that looked like grass.

Bart and Mary and Helen sat uncertainly at their bridge table, trying to somehow adapt themselves to a situation that they were in no way prepared to face. It wasn't their fault, Gordon knew. They had not been conditioned to handle *new* elements. That was his job. That was what he had been

chosen for. He was the change factor, the mind that had been left free enough to function.

But not wholly free. He felt that keenly, here in the room with the man called John. He was fuzzy and approximate. He needed to be clear and exact. He tried to believe he had figured it all out. *Hypnosis*. That was a good word.

He hoped that it was good enough.

"A liar?" The man who looked like Grandfather Walters laughed in protest and blew smoke in Collier's eyes. "The projection was incorrect?"

Collier shook his head, ignoring the smoke, trying not to be distracted. "The information was correct. That proves nothing."

John arched his bushy eyebrows. "Oh? Come now, my man."

"Look here," Gordon Collier said decisively, believing it now. "You look like a man to me. All I have to contradict my impression is your unsupported statement and some

funny tricks that can be explained in terms of conditioning and hypnosis. If you came from Earth, as you obviously did, then you would know the story as well as I do. The rest is tricks. The real question is: who sent you here, and why?"

It was cold in the room. Why was it so cold?

John deftly added more ashes to the small mountain at his feet. "Your logic is excellent, if primitive," he said. "The trouble with logic is that its relationship with reality is usually obscure. It is logical that I am from Earth. It is not, however, true."

"I don't believe you," Gordon Collier said.

John smiled patiently. "The trouble is," he said, "that you have a word 'alien,' and no concept to go with it. You persist in reducing me to non-alien terms, and I assure you that I will not reduce. I am, by definition, not human."

The doubt came again, gnawing at him. He fought himself. He felt an icy chill

trip along his spine. He tried to convince himself and he said: "There is a reason for the storms and the build-up and the screams. I think it is a human reason. I think you have been sent here by the interests on Earth who are fighting space expansion, to try to scare us off. I think you're a good actor, but I don't think you're good enough."

The thought came again:
If this is an alien . . .

Nonsense.

Helen, at the bridge table, suddenly stirred. She said: "My, but it's late." That was all.

John ignored her. "I assure you," he said, "that I have not the slightest interest in whether your little planet gets into space or not. Your ethnocentrism is fantastic. Can't you see, man? I don't care, not at all, not in any particular. It just isn't part of my value system."

"Go back and tell them it didn't work," Gordon Collier said.

"Oh no," John said, shocked. "I'm spending the night."

The silence tautened.

Mary moved at the bridge table. The button had been punched, and she tried to respond. "Bart," she said, "set up the spare bed for the nice man."

Bart didn't move.

"You're not staying," Gordon Collier said flatly. He shook his head. He was so confused. If only—

John smiled and lit another cigarette from his endless supply. "I really must, you know," he said cheerfully. "Look at it this way. The star cluster to which you refer as *the* galaxy—quaint of you—is inhabited by a multitude of diverse cultural groups. A moment's reflection should show you that uniformity of organisation over so vast a territory is impossible. The problem of communications alone would defeat such a plan, even were it desirable, which it isn't.

"One of these cultures, of which I happen to be a member, has no territorial identification, except with space itself. Our ship is our home. We are, in a manner of speaking, nomads. Our economy, since we produce nothing, is based upon what we are able to extract from others."

Gordon Collier listened to his heart. It drummed liquidly in his ears.

"The closest similarity I can find in your mind is that of the ancient Plains Indians in the area you think of as North America," John continued, his blue eyes sparkling. "How charming that you should regard them as primitive! Sedentary economies are so dull, you know. We have become rather highly skilled, if I do say so myself, at imitating dominant life forms. Contacting aliens for preliminary 'typing' is a prestige mechanism with us, just as counting *coup* served an analogous purpose among your Plains Indians, when a brave

would sneak into an enemy camp at night and touch a sleeping warrior or cut loose a picketed horse. This gave him prestige in his tribe, and without it he was nothing; he had no status. With us there is a further motive. Suppose, to extrapolate down to your level, you wish to pick apples. It will be to your advantage, then, to try to look and act like the farmer who owns them, will it not? Our culture has found it expedient to 'type' members of an alien culture in a controlled situation, before setting out to, so to speak, pick apples in earnest. The individual who does the 'typing' gains prestige in proportion to the danger involved. Am I getting through to you?"

Gordon Collier got to his feet, slowly. He could not think, not really. In a way, he realised this. He tried to go ahead regardless, to do what he could. His brain supplied a thought: *What would the ship from Earth pick up five months from tonight in this silent*

cottage? Would it be human beings—or something else?

Of course, John was a human being.

A hypnotist, perhaps.

Why was it so cold in the house?

He started for the man called John, slowly, step by step. He did not know why he did it; he only knew that he had to act, act now, act before it was too late, act despite the cost. The impulse came from down deep, beyond the conditioning.

"You're a liar," he said again, biting the words out thickly, believing in them. "You're a liar. We don't believe in you. Get out, get out, get out——"

If this is an alien, the dream is ended. Unless——

The man called John slid out of his chair and backed away. His blue eyes glittered coldly. The cigarette between his fingers shredded itself to the floor, squeezed in two.

"Stop," said John.

Gordon Collier kept on coming.

The man called John—changed.

Gordon Collier screamed. It was an animal scream.

He staggered back, back against the wall. His eyes were shut, jammed shut as tightly as he could force them. His mouth was open, to let the endless scream rip and tear itself out from the matrix of his being. He cowered, crouched against the wall, a creature in agony.

He was afraid that he would not die.

His hands shook, and they were clammy with the cold sweat that oozed from his palms. A white flash of indescribable pain seared up from his toes, burned like molten lead through his body. It hissed along his naked nerves and howled into his cringing brain with the numbing, blinding impact of a razor-sharp chisel on a rotten tooth. Blood trickled wetly from his nostrils.

He clawed the floor, not feeling the splinters in his nails.

The scream screeched to a piercing climax that bulged his eyes from their sockets.

Something snapped.

His body relaxed, trembling quietly. His mind was clean and empty, like a flower washed with the summer rain. He breathed in great choking mouthfuls of air. He remembered——

It had *bubbled*.

He shut it out. He lay quite still for a long minute, letting the life wash warmly back through his veins. His breathing slowed. He felt a tiny thrill of triumph course through his body.

His mind was clean.

He could think again.

He took a deep breath and turned around.

The cottage was still there. The frigidaire wheezed in the kitchen. The living room was unchanged. There were the chairs, the tri-di, the picture of Grandfather Walters, the ashes on the rug, the three motionless figures at the bridge table. Bart and Mary and Helen.

They were very still.

Yes, of course. Their conditioned minds had been strained past the tolerance point and they had blanked out. Short-circuited. The fuse had blown. They were out of it, for now.

He was alone.

The man called John was seated again in his armchair, blue eyes twinkling, moustache neat and prim, the pile of ashes at his feet. He had lit another cigarette. He was smiling, quite himself again.

Or, rather, he was *not* himself again.

Gordon Collier got to his feet. It took him a long time, and he did it clumsily. He was shaken and weak in the knees. He had lost the fuzziness which had partially protected him.

But he had his mind back.

It was, he thought, a fair trade.

"I fear the shock has been too much for your dull friends," John said languidly, crossing his legs carefully so

as not to disturb the neat crease in his trousers. "I tried to warn you, you know."

Gordon said: "You can't stay here." The words were thick and he licked his lips with his parched tongue.

John hesitated, but recovered quickly. "On the contrary," he said, "I can and I will. A charming place, really. I'd like to get to know you better."

"I can imagine," said Gordon Collier.

The silence beat at his ears. It was uncanny. He had never heard no-sound before.

Black despair settled within him like cold ink. The situation, he now saw, was frightening in its simplicity. He had to accept it for what it was. The thing was alien. It didn't *care* what the effects of its visit would be on the future of Earth. Human beings were to it what pigs were to a man.

Does the hungry man worry about whether or not pigs have dreams?

"You're going to get out," he told it.

The man called John raised an eyebrow in polite doubt.

Gordon Collier was not sure, now, that man *should* leave the Earth. It was odd, he thought, that his concern was still with the dream. Regardless of his actions here, all the human beings would not be "eaten." Many would escape, and the species would recover. But if this thing, or even any news of it, reached the Earth, then the dream was finished. The whole shaky, crazy structure that had put man into space would collapse like a card house in a hurricane. Man—or what was left of him—would retreat, build a wall around himself, try to hide.

And if he did get into space to stay?

Gordon Collier didn't know. There were no simple answers. If the aliens, or even the intelligence that there *were* such aliens, reached the Earth, then man was through, dead in his insignificance. If not, he had a chance to shape his own destiny. He had won

time. It was as simple as that.

Gordon Collier again faced the man called John. He smiled.

Two cultures, locked in a room.

From the bridge table, three sluggish statues turned to watch.

To Gordon Collier, the only sound in the room was that of his own harsh breathing in his ears.

"As I was saying," said the man called John, "I'm afraid I really must ignore your lamentable lack of hospitality and stay on for a while. I am, you might say, the man who came to dinner. You are quite helpless, Gordon Collier, and I can bring my people here at any time. Enough of them, you see, to fill both your houses and the air bubble beyond. It will be alive with my people. You are quite helpless, Gordon Collier, and I can bring my people here at any time. Enough of them you see, to fill . . ."

Gordon Collier refused to listen to the voice that tried to

lull him back to sleep. He shut it out of his mind. He had but one weapon, and that was his mind. He had to keep it clear and uncluttered.

John kept talking, melodically.

Gordon Collier tried to think, tried to organise his thoughts, collect his data, relate it to a meaningful whole.

Somewhere there is a pattern.

Several pieces of information filed away by his conditioned brain until it could assemble them, clicked into place like parts of a puzzle. Now that the fog was gone, a number of facts were clear.

He used his mind, exultantly.

For one thing, of course, the man called John had given him more information than was strictly necessary. Why? Well, he had explained about the prestige mechanism involved—and the more danger there was, the more prestige. An important fact followed: if he, Gordon Collier, were in fact utterly helpless, then there

was no danger, and no prestige.

And *that* indicated . . .

" . . . lamentable lack of hospitality and stay on for a while," the voice droned on in his ears. "I am, you might say, the man who came to dinner. You are quite helpless, Gordon Collier, and I can . . ."

So John had armed him with information. He had been playing a game of sorts, a game for keeps. He had given his opponent clues. What were they? *What were they?*

" . . . bring my people here at any time. Enough of them, you see . . ."

"*The trouble is,*" John had said, "*that you have a word 'alien,' and no concept to go with it.*"

Gordon Collier stood motionless between John and the three immobile figures at the bridge table, looking for the string that would untie the knot. John's voice buzzed on, but he ignored it.

From the first, he remembered, John had kept himself

apart from the human beings. He had walked in, hesitated, said his stilted tri-di derived introductory remarks, and seated himself as Grandfather Walters. He had remained isolated. He had never come really close to any of the human beings, never touched them.

And when Gordon Collier had advanced on him . . .

Collier stared at the man called John. Was he telepathic, or had he picked up his story before he ever came through the door? Was he listening in on his thoughts even now?

That was unimportant, he realised suddenly. That was a blind alley. It made no practical difference. What counted was a simple fact—the alien could not touch him. And, presumably, it wasn't armed; that would have counter-balanced the danger factor.

It was very cold in the room. Gordon Collier felt a sick thrill in the pit of his stomach.

"... to fill both your houses and the air bubble beyond. It will be alive ..."

There was danger for the alien here. There *had* to be. Gordon Collier smiled slowly, feeling the sweat come again to his hands. There could be but one source for that danger.

Himself.

He saw the picture. It was quite clear. All that build-up, all the sounds and the rain and the wind, had been designed to test man in a beautiful laboratory situation. If man proved amenable to "typing," then he was next on the food list.

Pigs.

If he didn't crack, if he fought back even *here* and *now*, then the aliens would have to play their game elsewhere. Death wasn't fun, not even to an alien.

Death was basic.

Yes, it was quite clear what he had to do. He didn't know that he could do it, but he could try. He was weak on his

legs and there was a cold shriek of memory that would not stay buried in his mind. He bit his lip until he felt the salt taste of blood in his mouth. He was totally unprotected now, and he knew the price he would have to pay.

He smiled again and walked slowly toward the man called John, step by steady step.

Gordon Collier lived an eternity while he crossed the room. He felt as though he were trapped in a nightmare that kept repeating itself over and over and over again.

The six dead eyes at the bridge table followed him.

"Stop," said John.

Gordon Collier kept coming.

The man called John slid out of his chair and backed away. His blue eyes were cold with fear and fury.

"Stop," he said, his voice too high.

Gordon Collier kept coming.

That was when John—changed.

Gordon Collier screamed—and kept on walking. He shaped his screaming lips into a smile and kept on walking. He felt the sickness surge within him and he kept on walking.

Closer and closer and *closer*.

He screamed and while he screamed his mind clamped on one thought and did not let go: *if that seething liquid hell is hideous to me, then I am equally hideous to it.*

He kept walking. He kept his eyes open. His foot stepped into the convulsive muck on the floor. He stopped. He screamed louder. He reached out his hand to *touch* it. It bubbled icily . . .

He knew that he would touch it if it killed him.

The thing—cracked. It contracted with lightning speed into half its former area. It got away. It boiled furiously. It shot into a corner and stained the wall. It tried to

climb. It heaved and palpitated. It stopped, advanced, wavered, advanced—

And retreated.

It flowed convulsively, wriggling, under the door.

Gordon Collier screamed again and again. He looked at the three dead-alive statues at the bridge table and sobbed. He was wrenched apart.

But he had won.

He collapsed on the floor, sobbing. His face fell into the mound of dry grey ashes by the armchair.

He had won. The thought was far, far away . . .

One of the statues that had been his wife stirred and somehow struggled to her feet. She padded into the bedroom and got a blanket. She placed it gently over his sobbing body.

"Poor dear," said Helen, "he's had a hard day."

Outside, there was a whistle and a roar, and then the pale light of dawn flowed in and filled the sky.

The five months passed, and little seemed changed.

There was only one little white cottage now, and it was on Earth. It snuggled into the Illinois countryside. It had green shutters and crisp curtains on the windows. It had knick-knacks on the mantelpiece over the fireplace. It had a fragment of cosy poetry, caught in a dime-store frame . . .

Gordon Collier was alone now, and the loneliness was a tangible thing. His mind was almost gone, and he knew that it was gone. He knew that they had put him here to shelter him, to protect him, until he should be strong enough to take the therapy as Helen and Bart and Mary had taken it.

But he knew that he would never be strong enough, never again.

They pitied him. Perhaps, they even felt contempt for

him. Hadn't he failed them, despite all their work, all their expert conditioning? Hadn't he gone to pieces with the others and reduced himself to uselessness?

They had read the last notation in the equipment room. Odd, that a meteor could unnerve a man so!

He walked across the green grass to the white picket fence. He stood there, soaking up the sun. He heard voices—children's voices. There they were, three of them, hurrying across the meadow. He wanted to call to them, but they were far away and he knew that his voice would not carry.

He stood by the white fence for a very long time.

When darkness came, and the first stars appeared above him, Gordon Collier turned and walked slowly up the path, back to the warmth, and to the little white cottage that waited to take him in.

Everyone's had that odd
I've-been-here-before
feeling. Deja Vu they call it; a
trick of the memory. Or is it?

PILGRIMS ALL

by ROBERT PRESSLIE

IT WAS A HELLUVA SITUATION, Spicer thought. It had happened to people before, millions of times. Without straining his memory he could recall half a dozen occasions when he had felt it himself—that uncanny I've-been-here-before feeling. But this time it was more than uncanny. It was insane. Spicer was standing on the Moon.

He stood with his boots a centimetre deep in the ash-bed of the Mare Imbrium, little more than a ship's shadow-length from the rim of a smallish crater. Behind him the ash was glazed and still red in places where the ship had blown its breath hotly on it. His heart had barely regained its normal rhythm

after the nervous excitement of making the landing. And now, when he should have been elated by his success and jubilant because he stood where no other man had ever stood, he was surprised at the familiarity of the locale and frightened because he knew there was no mistake—he had been there before.

He tried to view the situation rationally. He knew perfectly well that he could not have been there before, therefore, the feeling was an illusion. There were a thousand things to be done, a thousand reports to be radioed to Earth. But the things to be done seemed less urgent than they had at the briefing. Because he knew equally well

that the feeling was no illusion.

He knew that if he walked down the long morning shadow of the ship to where it touched the steep rim of the crater he would find a pass to the inside. In all the towering might of the rim there was one place where a climb of thirty metres would give the climber access to the floor of the crater. And Spicer knew the route as he knew the street where he had been born.

It may have been the training, he told himself. It had been thorough. Nothing had been left out. There had been maps by the ream and photographs by the thousand. But the maps had been drawn a quarter million miles away and none of the camera shots had shown close-ups. That was one of the things he had to do—bring back on-the-spot photographs.

He thought further back. Long before the service, before leaving school even, he had dreamed of space. Most of all he had dreamed of the

Moon. He had read about it, talked about it. He had made a point of seeing every cine and television film concerning fictitious Moon landings. And that was the point. At no time up to the present had he seen or read anything to give him such certainty of his whereabouts and what lay within a few hundred metres.

Barring sheer clairvoyance, which he spurned to recognise, there was only one explanation open to him—racial memory. It was a weak and tenuous theory, but it was the only feasible one, and the more he thought of it the more he became convinced that in racial memory lay the answer to his problem. Men had been on the Moon before; he had inherited the memory of their visit.

But where was the evidence? History books had nothing to say about it. Pre-history legend was equally quiet on the subject. Spicer wanted to know more. With mutinous disregard for his orders he

walked away from the ship and along its shadow.

At the tip of the shadow he hesitated. For twenty metres ahead the white ash was flat and barren. Then a white mountain soared precipitously upwards, unbelievably perpendicular. From Spicer's viewpoint the mountain was an endless wall, stretching to left and right as far as he could see. It was a wall—the sky-piercing periphery of the crater.

Spicer's hesitation was momentary. He turned his face slightly north-east and walked in that direction. He did not stop when he came to the foot of the towering wall.

Sure-footed, like a mountain goat picking its way over familiar territory, he climbed. Fifteen metres up he was faced by a blank slab of rock, utterly smooth and without a niche for hand or boot. He wasn't foxed. Two breathless steps to the right, *he remembered*, there was a hidden flange—just broad

enough for his gloved fingers to catch and hold while he scrambled with his boots for the next foothold.

Another fifteen metres up and he found a cave. His eyes told him it was a cave. But his memory insisted that the hole confronting him was the entrance to a long, naturally formed tunnel which passed from the outside to the inside of the crater wall. He triggered the beacon on his chest and stooped his way through the blackness of the tunnel.

The I've-been-here-before feeling which had guided him thus far deserted him now. Fear returned. He was like a child who had been taken into the middle of a forest and left there. He cursed himself for heeding the memory. To continue and descend into the floor of the crater in the darkness was impossible and unthinkable. To return the way he had come was hazardous and made the entire journey seem pointless. Yet it was the only thing to do.

Spicer put out his hand to

steady himself while he turned. He touched metal.

The thing he touched did not ring. There was no air to carry sound; nor could outside sound have penetrated his helmet. But when his gloved hand struck the object there was a tell-tale reverberation under his fingers which told him the thing was metal and hollow. He swung round until the light from his beacon lapped his hand.

It was metal. The part beneath his hand was the narrowest part. The rest of it lay against the rampart of the crater and extended, apparently, to the floor, broadening all the way down.

The shape was very familiar. Here was the answer to his problem—an answer that posed more questions than it solved. Someone had been there before. Their ship was still there. But whose ship? And how long had it lain there? And how had he known where to find it?

He didn't have to wonder long. The darkness of his

confusion and the darkness of the crater were scattered by one single occurrence. Thirty metres below him the ship opened an eye. A port had swung on its hinges or a panel had slid aside. Spicer couldn't tell from where he stood. All he could tell was that the ship wasn't old and dead. Light glared from the opening in its side.

His first instinct was to run, to scramble back through the tunnel. Reason and curiosity quelled the primal instinct, stopped his twitching muscles. Reason argued that there was nothing supernatural confronting him, only a spaceship built of metal and plastic, presumably piloted by flesh and blood. Curiosity wanted to know when, whence and who—particularly who.

Spicer waited a minute for further developments. There were none. The port remained open. Nobody came out. He began the long climb down.

The stabbing light of his lamp filled the pockets of

darkness untouched by the beam from the ship, and the climb was less arduous than he expected. He reached the porthole without accident.

Having summoned his courage to get that far, he saw no point in hesitating at the ship's entrance. He gripped the curved edge and swung himself inside.

The circular door closed behind him.

He spun on his heels, clawed at the smooth surface with his clumsy gloves.

"Take it easy!"

He spun again, looking to see who had spoken.

"It is necessary. An atmosphere of oxygen is building up now. You understand?"

There was nobody.

"You may remove your helmet. It is safe."

Spicer jerked his eyes all around. There wasn't even a place where anyone could be hiding. This was nothing more than an airlock with bare walls and bare floor. Who was speaking? Who was asking

him to take on trust a declaration that the lock was full of oxygen? And how could he hear a voice with his helmet on and his radio dead?

He killed the inflow from his gas cylinders and eased the expanding band which locked his helmet to the neck of the suit. There was a sigh as the pressure in his suit equalised with that outside. He was ready to spin the controls, but the sigh died quickly, proving that the lock had an atmosphere of some sort, and somewhere around fourteen pounds of it.

He dribbled out his withheld breath and inhaled cautiously. It seemed safe. He took six lungfuls before deciding that no attempt was being made to stun, poison or asphyxiate him. When he touched the helmet again it was to remove it.

"I am coming up!"

Spicer watched the floor. A flush-fitting circle which he had not noticed before started to move. He was surprised when it rose ver-

tically. He had been expecting it to fold back like a lid.

The circle continued to rise until it touched the ceiling of the airlock. As it rose, he saw that gravity was not being defied. The circle was the top of a transparent plastic cylinder. The cylinder itself was an elevator—like none he had ever seen, but an elevator.

The cylinder contained a complicated assembly of black, white and bronze metals. Some of the metal had been fashioned into hemispheres and rectangular boxes. Some of it had been tortured into helical tubing. Spicer identified it as machinery. He couldn't name it further. He looked for the owner of the voice.

But he realised he would not see it. With all the metal in the cylinder there was no room for flesh and blood.

"Who——?" he wavered.

"You have a ship?"

Spicer gulped and nodded. The question was repeated. He said he had a ship.

"It didn't crash? It is capable of returning to Earth?"

I hope so, Spicer said to himself.

"Good."

"I didn't say anything— Oh, I get it." This was something he had read about. This was fairly familiar ground. Rhine and all that. "Why?" he asked firmly.

"Because, if you will grant me the favour, I would like to go back with you."

Would you now. A heap of fancy tape-recorder wants to visit Earth. Maybe a ton of it, and payload was calculated to decigrammes. Spicer shook his head; he was thinking off the straight.

"I can take a very limited quantity of geological specimens," he said. "Nothing else. Nothing at all."

"That's a pity. I did want to reach Earth . . . again."

"Again?"

"Of course. It's been so long. Waiting. Waiting for someone like you. And you could so easily take me. The extra freight would be pre-

cisely nil. The—the apparatus doesn't have to go. Only me."

Spicer's head was full of questions. What was meant by *again*? Did that imply that the owner of the ship had been there before? Why had he been waiting? How long? But of all the questions, Spicer voiced only the most puerile: "Who's me?" At least it sounded puerile after he had asked it.

"I'm a Terran."

"So I was correct! It was racial memory after all. I figured it that way. How else could I have found this ship?" When his voice was silent, Spicer's mind rushed on. Here was the proof of the explanation—this ship. To think that millions of years ago Terrans like himself had—

"Not like you." Spicer's thoughts were interrupted. "No, not like you. We were the Terrans. You were the invaders."

Then the story came out. The original men of Earth had been peaceable, living out a simple, if technologically

secure, life on their green Eden, a hick planet, far from the centre of the galaxy. Into their Eden had come other men, men from the frenetic buzz of the Hub, men like Spicer. Earth wasn't a particularly valuable jewel to add to their collection, but they had to have it just for the sake of possession. They took it and threw the Terrans out.

"We retreated here to the Moon. But even in exile we were not spared. The bombardment was—well, you must have seen for yourself. We were forced to banish ourselves further. And further still when we found that the men from the Hub seemed to be in possession everywhere. We had to go far. It took us a long time to come back. I alone made it, or almost made it. My ship crashed here."

Without their great technology, the Terrans would have died out eons ago. As far as they were harried, there was always passed on to the children that burning desire

to see Earth again. And when the decision was made to start on the road back, it was found that the people were few and the road long. They tried suspended animation for several thousand years. But those who remained alert as guardians saw the flaw in this. Successive generations of guardians became less and less like the sleepers. Their minds continued to develop, leaving the sleepers as mere infants intellectually. And so the sleepers were awakened, and for a time the tiny race intermingled until the breed was one. Only then was the master plan, evolved by the guardians, put into action.

It had been discovered possible to dissociate the mind, the ego, from the body. The body was no longer necessary. What was left, the essential Terran, was not entirely immaterial; there was matter and mass, but it was as tenuous and as minute as the matter and mass of a magnetic field.

Spicer had a fleeting memory

of the ancient philosopher who had weighed a dying man immediately before and after death, and had found no difference in weight, concluding therefrom that there was no such thing as a soul.

"Soul?" There was an inflection of query, doubt. It was dismissed. "The problems of feeding, clothing, the thousand needs of the physical body were solved. We had all the time in the world now. All we needed were machines like this cylinder to convey our instructions to the machinery of the ship."

"What happened to the rest?" asked Spicer.

"We were still not entirely correct. We didn't quite have all the time in the world. Even dissociated from the mortal body, the ego is not immortal. I was the youngest. I am the last. The Earth is my shrine. I should like to see it."

The last pilgrim of a long pilgrimage, thought Spicer. He did not for a second entertain the possibility that the

pilgrim was lying. Everything fitted in too well with his experience in the past hours to be anything but the gospel truth.

Still—to take an invisible presence back to Earth? He wasn't so sure.

"If I agree," he said, cautiously, "just what will it entail? How do you get out of that thing?"

"I could go out of this ship with you, inside your suit."

A wave of doubt and fear radiated from Spicer's mind.

"The method is only a convenience, I assure you. Nebulous as I am, I do need one thing to keep me alive—heat. Apart from its mechanical function, this apparatus has supplied me with the small quantity of heat I required to survive throughout the long wait I've had here. To get from my ship to yours without dying I must travel in your suit. Provided your ship is suitably heated, our proximity need be no longer than the

time it takes to reach the ship."

Spicer hesitated. The pilgrim was asking a lot.

"Take your time. I realise you must be wondering about all the dire things that could, perhaps, happen to you once I was in beside you. Think it out well, and remember the decision is yours. I can't force you to agree. I ask only one thing. When you are weighing the facts, don't forget that I am mortal and old, my time on Earth—on home—would not be long. Don't forget that I am the last Terran. Don't forget who exiled my forefathers. Put yourself in my place and imagine how much I want to see Earth."

Spicer decided. "I'll do it."

And the doing of it was quick. A direction to touch the cylinder, the moving of a small lever, standing close when the plastic covering had peeled downwards, waiting while something wafted out of the machinery and into the open neck of his suit, yet feeling nothing.

Then the precarious climb

back to the tunnel. Through the tunnel. Across the ash.

And a pause at the foot of the ship, one last conjecture on the nature of the thing he was proposing to take back to Earth. A reassuring word from the pilgrim, proving its presence, and begging—actually begging—for that last look at Earth.

It was done, irrevocably done. The ship was spitting its contempt at the Moon and tilting its proud nose towards the green planet.

"Well," said Spicer. That was all he said, hoping the pilgrim would pick the rest out of his mind; the need for more assurance that he had done the right thing; the desire for a little appreciation and thanks.

But he never heard another word from the pilgrim, not by any means of communication.

For the pilgrim was busy with his own thoughts, keeping them carefully shielded. Which wasn't so difficult, really—the Terran was almost esp-deaf. The pilgrim chuckled

inwardly. The stuff that sap had swallowed!

It wasn't all lies. He had come a long way. True. He wanted to be on Earth. True. He had crashed on the Moon. True. He was formless. True—well, almost. He was formless when there was nothing suitable or available to inhabit. But that stuff about the old Terrans and the men from the Hub? Cackle-fodder!

The pilgrim chuckled the whole five hours it took for the ship to jump the gap. When the time came for the turning and the braking blast, he snickered as he slipped into the bucket seat and reached for the controls with his new hands.

He laughed outright when he saw the welcoming crowd at the field.

It was a helluva situation, he thought, flexing Spicer's muscles. First time on this juicy planet and I've got that I've-been-here-before feeling. I must remember to tell the fleet that one as soon as I get a transmitter rigged.

A tongue-in-cheek tale
on a subject on which too
many people are far too serious.

THE WILDER TALENTS

by VERONICA WELWOOD

"COME HERE!" PAUL Kennedy commanded at the pencil. It wafted up from the other side of the desk, drifted towards him, nearly, nearly—suddenly he lost control for the fraction of a second and it clattered to the floor.

"Damn and blast it!" exploded Paul. "Three pencils in the last five minutes with the lead shattered to blazes!" The curtains caught fire as his wave of anger billowed around them, and in a renewed burst of fury at his inability to control his wild talents, Kennedy poltergeistied a bucket of water from under the leak in his attic roof (it was pouring with rain outside since he'd broken the six-month drought) and doused flames, curtains and floor liberally.

"And to think how I slaved over hemstitching those drapes," thought his wife,

Myra, looking up sadly from her knitting.

"Don't say it, don't say it," roared Paul. "D'you think I don't know what you're thinking? And don't think about rage bringing on a heart attack. It unnerves me. A man can't esp in peace around here without being ctiticised all the time. I'm going out to the two-up game. Don't wait up for me."

He stopped short at the street door. An accident was about to occur; he could hear the squealing of brakes, an impact, the agonised scream of a woman . . . the accident would happen in five seconds. He braced himself, took a lungful of air, extended his hand to open the door.

There was a squeal of brakes, an agonised scream . . . The door opened on chaos—a panel-van labelled "Bull's Milk Supply" was slewed

crosswise in the narrow street, a still, white-frosted little body against its front wheels, a woman on her knees beside it weeping convulsively. Crashed into the side of the van was a small car, whose woman driver was having hysterics.

Strange, thought Paul—I only heard one accident. Maybe the first one—the panel-van hitting the child—happened while I was otherwise occupied upstairs. Yes, he decided, that's it—I clairviewed the second accident, in the hall, then heard it happen as I opened the door.

He strode forward eagerly, pushed aside the weeping mother, and laid his hands on the child's forehead, closing his eyes in an agony of concentration, giving up to the dead child a part of his own life-force. With a thrill of triumph, he felt the throb of a returning pulse in her temples, rose to his feet and hurried away. It was embarrassing to have to explain, to be thanked . . . better to leave the grief-stricken woman to discover the miracle for herself. He smiled secretively as he heard the approaching wail of an ambulance.

Johnno's "cockatoo" challenged him at the corner of

the lane which led to the illegal gambling ring. Careful, now—better not make himself conspicuous by teleporting past the fellow. If that mob inside ever found out he was PK-ing the pennies they'd prove too much, even for his powers. So far he could deal with only two thrown objects at a time.

Mentally, he ran over the training given by Dr. Coryza—visualise the situation "now," the desired situation, relate cause and effect, let your mind soak in the surroundings—then exert the fractional force necessary to tip the balance. Simple enough in this case—there were three possible methods. One, the simplest, a localised puff of wind to spin the already spinning pennies a little further; two, a concentration of mass by shifting the free electrons to the surface of the coin opposite from that one wished to have uppermost; and, three, the most difficult, a distortion of the gravitic field.

Offhandedly, he gave the password—it had taken him only three seconds to memorise every password for every day of the coming year for every gambling school in town; a mere trifle for his

eidetic memory—and shouldered his way into the ring in Johnno's back yard.

Number one first, just to get his hand in, as it were. A fiver would be enough for a start—a third of his pay envelope (after tax); mustn't arouse suspicion by betting too heavily.

"Get set on the side!" shouted the burly ring-keeper. Paul looked around, caught the eyes of several players who were having a quid each on heads, and put down his five one pound notes to say that both pennies would show tails on the next throw.

"Come in, spinner!"

He concentrated; this needed split-second decision. With fifty others, his eyes followed the coins, up, up, against the blue sky (he'd arranged for the rain to stop for a breather). Just a little thrust on the left-hand one—the bright-polished head side was upward. Now! A burst of nervous energy that left him gasping. Down—down—a craning of necks as the pennies landed in the dust of the ring.

Paul stared in disbelief. One head, one tail. Dammit, still not perfect on a simple little thing like that. Lost in thought, he nearly missed

the next spin—leaving his fiver still on tails—and realised as he threw his energies into drawing the balance of mass to one surface of each coin, that he might be too late. But, with a surge of elation, he saw the unpolished sides show, and raked in his tenner.

All up? Yes, in view of that last effort . . . wouldn't Myra get a shock when he came home with a pocketful of notes. Just to be different, he'd make it heads this time; somehow the concentration on the polished side of the coins helped in the field method. Quickly, he ran over the steps in his mind once more.

"Traps!" someone bawled.

Paul's eidetic memory took over: "Traps, snares, gins, springes, toils, nooses, nets..." No, no, that was the saurus. Subconsciously, he switched to the slang dictionary: "Traps, cops, bobbies, peelers—police!" and woke up with a yelp, too late.

". . . then, for no reason at all, your honour, after rolling the third pencil over the edge of his desk, he sprang up swearing, set a match to the curtains, ran to the bathroom and filled a bucket of water to put them out, and rushed

out shouting that he was going to play two-up——”

“Sometimes,” observed his honour, looking archly over the top of his pince-nez at the Press table, “known as ‘swy’.” The Press grinned sycophantically, and wrote it down. “Sorry, my dear—please proceed.”

“Yes, your honour,” Myra Kennedy went on. “And then, just as he went out, this awful accident happened. A milk van ran over a little girl, and a couple of seconds later a car came round the corner and crashed into the van. I saw it all from the window. Paul, my husband, just calmly walked over, looked at the dead child, and walked away, as if he had no human feeling at all, going off to his horrible gambling. So I rang the police and told them—that was after I rang the ambulance, of

course—where the two-up school was.”

“Where,” interrupted the judge once more, “he was apprehended with three others. The police, I fear, were a little slow.”

“Yes, your honour,” Myra resumed once more. “I submit that this behaviour, coupled with that of the last few weeks, is not normal. I respectfully request the Court to commit my husband for examination by the Lunacy Commissioners.”

So that’s how Paul Kennedy, wildest of the wild talents of our age, comes to be in a padded cell—next door, incidentally, to his guide, philosopher and drinking-cobber, Dr. Coryza of the Earle Foundation. The good doctor says it may be years before they can teleport outside; the atmosphere is too unfriendly.



Book Reviews

FICTION

CHRISTMAS EVE, by C. M. Kornbluth, published by Michael Joseph Ltd., 26 Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.1, at 10s. 6d., is another smooth production by a man who knows both how to write and how to write science fiction; a combination which isn't as common as it should be.

America is invaded by victorious Soviet and Chinese armies; surrender is total, the President is shot and the occupation commences. In rich farming country a mixed lot of farmers, shopkeepers and country residents are trying to carry on as usual and Billy Justin, a man who only wants to be left alone, finds that his simple desire is the one thing others won't let him have.

Justin is no hero, but the choice offered to him at any time forces him to become

one. It is easier on the conscience to defy the occupation forces rather than betray those who, all unasked, insist on trusting him with the secrets of the underground and the almost completed space station loaded with atomic missiles which is hidden beneath a local hill. The space station, if completed, could reverse the occupation, free America from two armies and restore an uneasy peace. To get it finished and into space is made Justin's responsibility.

The pattern of conquest in this book is all too familiar to Europeans who have lived through similar circumstances. It is the inevitability of what must happen rather than any purely physical horror which provides the book with its mounting tension. The ending is a "happy" one, but it could so easily have been otherwise and, as the author points out,

superior force and armed might is not the real solution to a troubled world.

TIME TRANSFER, by Arthur Sellings, published by Michael Joseph, at 12s. 6d., is a collection of sixteen short stories all well-written and all highly entertaining.

They range from the thought-provoking moral in *The Age of Kindness* to the delightful humour in *Categorical Imperative* and *The Boy Friends*, with a peculiar touch of horror in *Jukebox*. This is a collection of stories which will do much to gain the medium greater literary merit.

DEEP SPACE, by Eric Frank Russell, published by Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd., 15 Bedford Street, London, W.C.2, at 12s. 6d., is a book of nine stories which are right out of the rut.

Beginning with a novelette, *First Person Singular*, an Adam and Eve story with a difference, the selection covers the universe and opens wide the gates of imagination to end with *Second Genesis* which, in a way, takes you back to where

you started, with a difference and an impact which leaves you with that warm, well-read feeling tinged only with the regret that the book couldn't have been at least four times bigger.

NON-FICTION

FLYING SAUCERS COME FROM ANOTHER WORLD, by Jimmy Guieu, published by Hutchinson & Co. Ltd., 178-202 Great Portland Street, London, W.1, at 12s. 6d., is a book which some will refer to as fiction while others will insist is fact.

In effect, it is a blend of both. The eye-witness accounts of Unidentified Flying Objects are fact, while the assumptions drawn from them must, and can only be, regarded as fiction. Whether the assumptions are shrewd guesses as to the truth must be left for the reader to decide; and the author presents the evidence in a lucid and extremely interesting manner.

Undoubtedly, there is much unexplained phenomena in the world about us, and much of it has been too-hastily dis-

missed because it refuses to be fitted into neat, scientific pigeonholes. Unfortunately, too many people with absolutely no justification for their claims have announced that they know all the answers and have blithely stated that their views are the right and only possible explanation of observed phenomena. This has resulted in a natural antipathy against these self-appointed experts who overlay a grain of fact with a mountain of supposition; who distort evidence to suit their own creed, and who use invective against the "fools" who refuse to agree that they are correct.

This book will do much to undo that harm and should be read and considered by all who are interested in the world and universe around them.

MAKING AND USING A TELESCOPE, by H. P. Wilkins, F.R.A.S., and Patrick Moore, F.R.A.S., published by Eyre & Spottiswoode Ltd., at 12s. 6d., is a handbook for all who are interested in astronomy, whether they are interested in building their own equipment or not.

Even if the intention is not initially to make a telescope, the reader will be fascinated by the history of telescopes; the concise and detailed instructions which enable anyone to build their own instrument at a fantastically low cost, and the suggestions for using the instrument when made so as to obtain the best and most interesting viewing.

The book is printed on fine paper, lavishly illustrated, and contains a wealth of information of interest to all who have lifted their eyes to stare at the stars. A well-written, well-produced book.

SCIENCE UNFOLDS THE FUTURE, by J. G. Crowther, published by Frederick Muller Ltd., Ludgate House, 110 Fleet Street, London, E.C.4, at 18s., is one of those books which are a must for any lover of science fiction.

It is speculation, yes, but a careful, expertly assessed speculation on the probability of the immediate future. The field covers the first attempts to go beyond the Earth; the news from the invisible which the radio-astronomers are

bringing us from the dark places of the universe and then returns to more familiar surroundings to deal with the problems of population and food.

Strangely enough, the author holds the opinion that the fundamental difficulty of the future will not be too many people, but too few, and goes on to explain how automata will relieve mankind of all routine and secondary tasks; a view which may, perhaps, be optimistic, but could well prove to be true. Following this the author discusses how man can surpass himself and break existing human records. Finally, he describes the present stage on the journey to the origin of life.

If the field is wide, the subject is even wider, but this book does serve as a brilliant "interim report" on the advance of science.

PRACTICAL ASTRONOMY, by W. Schroeder, published by Werner Laurie Ltd., 1 Doughty Street, London, W.C.1, at 25s., is a book about the universe for all those

who are interested in something other than their own back yard.

This book is a new approach to a very old science, as it deals with a practical approach to work which can be done by any reader. It is not a textbook, but a guide to those who are interested enough to devote a few hours of time to the fascinating complexities of the heavens around us. It encourages the reader to do some practical work for himself, both by actual viewing and in the comfort of his own room, no matter what weather conditions may be.

A unique advantage of this book is that it makes no use of mathematics for the solution of problems; simple drawing tools are enough which, in conjunction with the tables, graphs and information provided, can enable the reader to grasp mapmaking, predict an eclipse of the moon, and do other intensely satisfying work with a small margin of error.

The book is profusely illustrated with photographs, star maps, diagrams, tables and other relevant drawings, and is a volume which will appeal to all.

Discussions

PRAISE

I have been a reader of science fiction since around 1937, and in my humble opinion your magazine has much to commend it.

I especially like the refreshingly British approach and style of most of your writers, with no attempt being made to copy their American counterparts. Let me hasten to add that I keenly enjoy the better American science fiction writers also.

Keep up the good work.
F/Lt. Miles, 164 Eu Gardens,
Argyle Street, Kowloon,
Hong Kong.

Imitation may be the sincerest form of flattery, but in science fiction it is its own downfall. Writers must exercise their own imaginations and develop their own style; to copy others because of their success is to admit failure. I am pleased to hear from a reader who can appreciate a different, not inferior, style of story telling.

CRITICISM

You asked for it.

Authentic will not go down to posterity as the proud publisher of good science fiction, for they will never be able to read it. To be enduring, a work of art should at least be made of sound materials, and this is where *Authentic* fails. I realise the cost mitigates against good paper but copies of the magazine only two years old show marked yellowing from bisulphite oxidation. During the last twenty

odd years as a librarian, I have been much concerned with the preservation of papers in books and journals, and I have seen the results of the neglect to use suitable paper. Apart from this point, the paper is a little stiff for the size of the page, but in quality generally it is far superior to that used by most periodicals of a similar nature. I note with pleasure that the sections are properly sewed, and not stapled, allowing for satisfactory permanent binding.

The double column format is distressing—the eye tends to run over to the next column owing to the comparatively narrow gutter between. I understand that the poor reproduction of half-tone blocks is due to technical reasons. I suggest that a coarser screen be used or scrap the half-tones altogether rather than disfigure good paper.

To come to the contents. I would like to put in a few remarks, firstly about the articles, about which there seems some diversity of opinion. For those who argue that they can get all the “dope” from their library, I maintain that these excellent and timely articles serve as useful fingerposts if kept brief and to the point; but why do so few of them give references to current books and articles for those who wish to pursue the subject further?

From my own experience, no one will be satisfied with all you offer. Judging by the Dec.—Feb. issues, most readers should have enough satisfaction. But vary the mixture

of long and short stories—too many short-shorts in one issue makes erratic reading. Personally, I hate serials.

To make it clear; I have experienced difficulty in satisfying all readers—there will always be those who complain "There is nothing worth reading here." I can always find something worth reading in *Authentic*, usually from cover to cover.

It is unusual for a librarian to criticise externals as I have, or to proffer suggestions. These I do as an admirer of good science fiction. R. F. G. Bompas, F.S.A. Library Association, 12 Vega Street, Fishers Hill, Germiston, South Africa.

Criticism is always welcome, especially when it is as pointed and as valuable as your own. The deterioration of the paper may be aggravated by climatical conditions in your locality. We have no such difficulty here. Half-tone illustrations have been dropped owing to the difficulty of good reproduction.

QUERY

The cover of No. 67 is excellent, nothing less; I've been admiring it, and all my friends agree with me that it is a fine cover. Please congratulate Mortimer on it.

Just one other thing. I have been trying to puzzle out what the illo is on page 123 of issue 67. All the stories were good in this issue. There are two things I would like to see in the magazine. A questions and answers department and SF film reviews.

Robert Town, 5 Onslow Parade, Ferring Street, Ferring-by-sea, Sussex.

The illo on page 123 should have been on page 122—a printer's error.

It represented a projection from the junior planetarium described in the article. SF film reviews are difficult owing to the release and publication schedules. You already have a questions and answers dept. This is it. Where are your questions?

HELP WANTED!

Can you please help? Are there any SF fan clubs in or near this town? I would also like to know where I could exchange my science fiction magazines. I can never get enough SF to read. I belong to four libraries, but none of them has many science fiction books. Any suggestions would be most helpful.

May I say here that I think *Authentic* is a fine magazine. Not quite 100% though. I, personally, like my stories a little longer—don't we all?

Mrs. Helen Oleksuik, 109 Olford Avenue, Southampton.

I don't know; do we? Length of stories can be altered to suit the majority, but first I have to know what they want, which means letter-writing, which is up to the readers. Libraries will obtain books for you on demand; just ask for the titles you want, or join the Science Fiction Book Club. Our review column will give you a guide to good reading and the latest SF books. As for the rest, where are you, you fans?

ANSWER PLEASE

First allow me to congratulate you on the latest issue of *Authentic*, No. 67. I'm pleased to see that you are getting back to a long lead story and have cut out most of the little articles. Now, how about cutting out the illustrations, the photographs, I mean? Unless they are very special they serve no useful purpose, and the reproduction is awful! But, please, let us have

THE HAPPY ENDING to the SMOKING HABIT



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After using "Apal" for nine days I can honestly state that smoking no longer interests me. I may add that I have been a pipe and cigarette smoker for about 38 years, so the "Apal" does all that you state.

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Mr. G. M., Brighton.

Dear Sirs,

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Miss M. J., Denbigh.

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more illustrations for stories. By Mortimer, naturally. I think that he is one of the best artists in the field. Keep him on the covers.

Could you answer a question for me? I suppose that it must sound awfully trite to you, but I haven't been reading science fiction for very long and have had no special schooling. I've read, in stories or perhaps in articles, of something called the Fitzgerald contraction. I'm rather vague as to just what was meant by it, something about things becoming small the faster they move, but is that correct?

Mrs. D. Harrison,
26 Merlin Crescent, Edgware,
Middlesex.

The Fitzgerald-Lorentz Contraction Theory is an explanation put forward independently, by Fitzgerald in 1893 and Lorentz in 1895, to explain the result of the Michelson-Morley experiment. This experiment was an attempt to measure the velocity of the Earth through the "ether" by measuring the effect which such a velocity should have on the velocity of light. No such motion was detected, and Fitzgerald and Lorentz explained the negative result by the supposition that a body moving with high velocity through the "ether" would contract in the direction of motion.

This supposition was later incorporated in the theory of relativity and, briefly, it can be regarded like this: as an object approaches the speed of light its mass increases and its length decreases. Theoretically, at the speed of light, an object would have infinite mass and no length at all.

To an observer inside a ship approaching the velocity of light no apparent change would be noticeable. The ship and everything in it would be contracted equally.

CORRESPONDENTS WANTED

Authentic is doing very well. Please do continue this good work. I am in the category of people who would like to see more scientific facts than pure SF. I also think that you should have more articles on Astronomy and Astrophysics, as well as some good articles on progress in Nuclear Physics and allied fields.

Furthermore, I would be very pleased to correspond with anybody—a university student for preference—interested in the Sciences, but especially in Physics and Astronomy. My fields of interest are mainly Radio Astronomy and Geochemistry.

Ronald A. Javitch,
1589 McGregor Street,
Montreal 25, Quebec, Canada.

Anyone interested?

CALLING NEW ZEALAND!

The Auckland Space Club is a science fiction club with a difference; its oldest member is only sixteen! A short while ago about eight fans and I got together and formed our own club. We have since increased in numbers—all members in the 14 to 16 age group—and have communicated with other N.Z. fan groups. We possess a good library and carry on the usual fan activities. We have published three quarterly issues of our fanzine *Nova* and we know of only two other N.Z. fanzines to date. There seems to be a considerable lack of fandom in N.Z. generally, which seems surprising in view of the fact that SF in its various forms is abundant here. R. J. Horrocks,
Auckland Space Club,
18 Hazlemere Road, Mt. Albert,
S.W.1, New Zealand.

Glad to hear of any new club. Keep it going!